

THE ARGOSY.

JANUARY, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER I.

THE HATHERLEYS.

IN that decade which began with the bombardment of Acre, and closed four years before the Crimean War, the drawing-room of Hatherley House looked very old-fashioned indeed.

For in those days, panelled walls, tiled fireplaces, carved oak furniture, and blue china were indications of the owner's character. Instead of meaning that he swam with the tide, it meant that he fought against it. Instead of betraying him for a worshipper of fashion, it stamped him for a devotee of the past. And in Marleyford, where the Hatherleys had lived for generations, their furniture was as much identified with them as their hereditary nose (a handsome aquiline), or their grand ancestral manner.

Their neighbours, prosperous, cheery modern folk, quitting their own plate-glass and gilding, and arriving in that gloomy room, were straightway possessed with a solemn sense of the dignity of the Hatherley tradition. And Mary, the only daughter of the house, sitting in her statuesque beauty, her quaker-like dress, on a straight-backed chair to receive them, seemed hardly nearer to their desires or their habits than a graven saint in a niche, or queen upon a tomb. John, too, the eldest son and the only son at home, with *his* sober, perfect attire, his faultless, marble face, and his reputation for exotic tastes, struck one as a young man whose youth was a polite concession to the course of nature, but in no sense a period of immaturity.

While the other rich or aspirant inhabitants of the town ransacked the Herald's office for armorial bearings and blazoned its inventions on the panels of their barouches, Mary rumbled along in a roomy chariot, with nothing but an initial on its chocolate-coloured doors. And while sons of tinkers and grandsons of tailors quitted their native town to blossom into esquires elsewhere, the Hatherleys with

every successive generation struck apparently deeper roots into the soil there. They gave it to be understood that it was their pride to remain where the founder of the family had made his fortune. That which he had become, that they persisted in being; and because his ambition had been crowned the day he bought a flourishing brewery, they professed to regard a brewery as the highest earthly possession.

A very upright, but a very stern man was the present head of the house. "Old Mr. Hatherley" he had been called ever since the stroke of paralysis which had laid him low, and left the greater part of the business in the hands of his son, John. He was everything which his father and grandfather had been before him, and more. A man of puritanic simplicity of life, and of rigid uniformity of conduct, he had never overlooked in his children or dependents the lightest disregard of his wishes. The Hatherleys had always been proud, clear-headed, just. All the organic qualities which had made his forefathers successful were crystallised in him. A psychologist might have wondered in what direction his children would develop, and argue badly from the fact that one of them, at least, had outraged every tradition. William, the second son, after a career of extravagance had enlisted in a West India regiment and was never mentioned. But in Marleyford psychologists were an unknown species. The good people of the little town judged exclusively from appearances, and were burdened with few theories. And appearances were so remarkably in favour of John and Mary Hatherley that it would have been difficult to have any doubts as to *their* future. The two handsome, correct, unexceptionable young people looked as though no evil could sink deeper into them than a fleck of dust into marble.

Mary, indeed, had had the faint beginnings of a love affair which bore a disturbing resemblance to the impetuosity and wrong-headedness of vulgar folk. She had engaged herself to her second cousin Ralph Mercer, a worthless spendthrift. He had been a ward of Mr. Hatherley's; but, quickly exhausting that gentleman's scanty store of patience, had been dismissed from the brewery in which he aspired to become a partner. "What will Miss Hatherley do?" was the source of some curiosity when this happened.

But Miss Hatherley apparently did nothing, only grew a little colder, a shade more reserved; and was supposed to be duly resigned.

As for John, whom he would marry was a question to which the answer was so long in coming that people had almost ceased to expect it. The greater part of his neighbours pronounced him a confirmed bachelor. He was over thirty and precise to a fault; moreover, he professed a mysterious affection for old editions of rare books.

John's acquaintances regarded his little library somewhat askant, or at best with the good-humoured contempt of people who are virtuously conscious of no definite superiority in themselves. And

it was remarked that the young man never aired his archaic scholarship in presence of his father. Mr. Hatherley was not a man to tolerate nonsense; that was well known. The best thing John had to do was to stick to the brewery, his skill in the management of which had proved him a chip of the old block.

One evening the Hatherleys were expecting guests to dinner. They gave solemn entertainments at regularly recurring intervals, and continued the practice even after Mr. Hatherley became an invalid. The large, low drawing-room was lighted with wax candles in silver sconces, while the gloom was further and still more picturesquely dissipated by the ruddy blaze of a glorious fire. Mary, seated by the hearth, was staring in silence—a somewhat moody silence, as it seemed—at the changing shapes in the glowing depths of heat. Every now and again her slender hands, clasped lightly together on her lap, moved restlessly, and her straight black brows met in a frown. Clearly her meditations were not pleasing. Opposite to her, blinking in a purblind, adoring, speechless way, like a superannuated King Charles, was Martha Freake.

Not that she was old, poor Martha, only her air was so humble and depressed, her face so crumpled with anxiety and love, her attire so dowdy, that she looked old. She was the Hatherleys' poor relation and housekeeper, and had lived with them since Mary had been left a motherless baby.

"Don't look so miserable, darling: it breaks my heart," she ventured to say, after a pause of sorrowful watching.

Mary shrugged her shoulders petulantly. "How can I help looking miserable, when I remember the state in which I saw him?" she retorted. Her tone was resentful, not to say sullen, and Martha quivered under it with an evident fear of having offended.

Before she could speak again the door opened to admit John. In evening dress he looked more majestic and unexceptionable than ever. "Good evening," he said, in mellow, measured tones, as he walked forward and established himself on the hearth-rug.

Both ladies responded, Mary almost inaudibly and without raising her head; Martha with a furtive, half-guilty glance.

"You have been to London?" said the latter, noticing that the young lady was not inclined to speak.

"Yes," answered John. "I heard of a Hague edition of Molière with original illustrations, and hurried up to buy it."

"And it took you three days to complete the purchase?" asked Mary suddenly; so suddenly that the question sounded like a challenge.

John pulled down his spotless cuffs, and flicked a speck of dust from the sleeve of his coat. "I had other business, but it was less important," he calmly replied.

"Business is an elastic term," continued Mary, while Martha turned pale and cast to her a look of imploring deprecation. "Whenever

men are bored at home, or have something to do which they do not care to talk about, it is easy to discover the necessity for a little trip, 'on business.'

She did not speak the words angrily, for the Hatherley manner was always calm; nevertheless, in her tone there ran a sound which might have been described as spite.

John smiled, but not genially. "You speak with a certainty that would almost suggest some personal experience of such little 'business trips.' But naturally the idea is absurd—since you are not a man."

Not another word was spoken, until the butler threw open the door, announcing the Rector and his wife, "Mr. and Mrs. Stratton;" close upon the heels of whom followed "Mr. and Mrs. Ormerod," and "Mr. Russell."

Mr. Ormerod was a banker, *the* banker of Marleyford, and Walter Russell was his nephew. The latter, a refined, intelligent-looking young man, had, as was well-known, at one time proposed to Mary. Anyone watching him closely now as he wished her "good evening," would have guessed that he was still in love with her, but she showed not the faintest sign of any feeling—unless it were a little added weariness.

"We were almost afraid this morning that we should not be able to come, for Mrs. Ormerod received news of the illness of her brother," said the banker's loud and cheerful tones.

"Sir Charles?" asked the Rector in a concerned voice, for Mrs. Ormerod's brother was a baronet.

"Sir Charles, yes, by Jove! Serious thing you know, especially now, when young Charles is laid up with scarlatina at school."

During the significant little pause that followed this speech, one or two people's eyes travelled with a veiled curiosity towards Walter; who, in the event of his boy-cousin's death, would be next heir to the title. Martha looked meekly and regretfully at Mary; but Mary gave no sign of comprehension.

"I hope you had better news later in the day?" said Mr. Stratton.

"Somewhat better. I went by rail into Canterbury to get the despatch. No necessity in these days to wait twenty-four hours for news. We shall soon have a wire here, I am told; and a good thing too."

"I have never used the telegraph yet," remarked John.

"Oh, you are a Tory to the backbone, my dear fellow. As much behind the age as—as—('your furniture,' the laughing Mr. Ormerod was just about to add, but checked himself)—as if you were your own grandfather, by Jove."

John smiled gravely. To a Hatherley such an accusation was a compliment, and the banker knew it.

"Mr. John lives at home, and has all his dear ones near him," observed Mrs. Ormerod, who had something of a languishing air.

"He does not yet know the anxieties, any more than the joys of a family."

"And you all think that he never will: don't you?" asked Mary, speaking almost for the first time, and with a sudden, slight briskness. John pulled down his waistcoat and cleared his throat. His air seemed to say that the conversation was growing frivolous.

"Everybody almost appears to have been to Canterbury to-day," said the Rector. "I was there, and so were you, Miss Hatherley, and Miss Freake."

From John's calm eyes there flashed the faintest perceptible ray of interest. Miss Freake turned rapidly of various lively hues. Only Mary remained to all appearance unmoved.

"We went on a shopping expedition," she replied.

"The shopping expeditions of ladies are like the business trips of men—of very frequent occurrence," quietly put in her brother; and the sentence had so little meaning to most of the hearers that they took it for a joke and laughed.

Other guests entered, and at last nine couples filed off into the dining-room, which had the same sombre and old-fashioned air as the drawing-room. The dinner was served on massive plate; John carved, and old port circulated. The portrait of the founder of the family, clothed in municipal robes and bearing the civic chain, looked down upon the scene from his huge gold frame above the chimney-piece. He had been a handsome, striking looking man, and it was curious to see how like John was to him—like, but "with a difference." The original brow was broader; the lips were fuller; the lines of his face though stern were not so rigid, and there was a fuller life behind them. John's face was like a mask, impassible, and might cover weakness as well as strength.

He was speaking of his recent purchase, Mr. Ormerod listening with a polite, half-amused smile.

"Original engravings?" he repeated. "Ah! very interesting, I am sure. Don't know much about such things myself. Where do you pick up these books?"

"At various dealers. But often, also, from private persons. The late possessor of the Molière lived in ——"

"Linden-Grove Road," suggested Mary from her end of the table.

"By no means. At the opposite end of London," corrected John.

Martha, looking uneasy, quavered out in her odd, semi-senile way, "Linden-Grove Road, Mary dear? Why, you are thinking of the neighbourhood where Parsons lives."

"Parsons?" John asked, rather sharply.

"Don't you remember her? She was housekeeper here once, years ago. She is bedridden now, and I go to see her sometimes," said Martha, timidly.

"I am glad you go to see her," replied John serenely, and turned with some careless remark to the lady on his right.

There was a little sleepy talk in the drawing-room later; a little mild music; Walter Russell said a few earnest words to Mary, who was looking pale and fatigued; and then at ten o'clock everybody went home.

"Mary!" began John on returning to the drawing-room after seeing his guests off: but Mary had already slipped away, and only Martha was left. She was obviously uneasy, and looked more deprecating than ever. Her cousin resumed:

"You were in Canterbury to-day, I hear. I need not ask the reason. Of course you went to meet Ralph Mercer." Some surprise now succeeded to the fear on Martha's face; never had John spoken to her on that subject in a tone so removed from irritation.

"It was partly my fault that we went," she began, anxious still to shield her darling; but he interrupted her with a wave of his hand.

"I ask for no explanations and wish for none. Mary knows my wishes, and those of our father. If she chooses to run counter to both, I cannot help it. But I would like you, Martha, to try to convince her that my desire—my most earnest desire—is that she would treat me with frankness; and abandon once for all these clandestine meetings, and these paltry subterfuges which are as unworthy of herself as insulting to me."

Martha stared at him in the blankest astonishment. The one point on which she had ever ventured to think John less than perfect had been his conduct in regard to his sister's engagement. For it was he, quite as much as his father, who had driven young Mercer away. Could it be that he was relenting?

John resumed: "This Parsons? It is strange I do not remember her."

"She was here for a very short time in your school-days, and left to get married. Jacobs is a cousin of hers. It was through him that I first heard she was ill."

"Jacobs?" John took up the tongs, and carefully arranged the fire. Jacobs was the butler, and had been some years in the family. The young master of Hatherley House was certainly in a very genial mood to-night, for while, as a rule, he troubled himself little about the servants, on this occasion Jacobs and Jacobs' cousin appeared to possess a singular interest for him.

"And the poor thing is bedridden, Martha? I hope she is in good circumstances?"

"Yes," Martha said, "her husband is a pawnbroker."

"In the City?"

"No. In a street not very far from that Linden-Grove Road which they were speaking of at dinner."

"Ah, yes. What a strange, absent-minded question that was of Mary's! What could have made her think that dealers in old books lived up there?" continued John, carelessly enough, but directing,

nevertheless, at his companion a swift sidelong glance; which she did not see. Her thoughts were absorbed in considering how she could make John a request that, if granted, would fill Mary with joy, and earn for Martha that which she most coveted, the expression of Mary's gratitude.

She sat gazing into the fire, her breath coming quickly as the words of her petition alternately trooped to her lips; then retreated, unuttered.

"It is late," said John, at last; rousing himself from a gloomy reverie, and eyeing her discontentedly.

Martha rose; lighted his candle, and handed it to him; paused, and then, with a valiant rush, stammered out the words:

"John, poor Ralph is really starving."

"Let him starve, the lazy, worthless scoundrel!" exclaimed John, with a sudden flash of fire in his eyes, before which she shrank back as scared as by the blaze of a line of guns.

Bowing her head meekly, she murmured, "Good-night," and crept upstairs, mortified, crestfallen, and heavy-hearted.

John retired to his library. This was a very handsome room where, installed in a high-backed chair in front of a pretentious table, he was accustomed to spend many hours, presumably in study. The people who found him there were always impressed in spite of themselves. And when the grave young man, with a wave of his hand towards a quaint-looking volume in vellum, would remark that it was an Aldine, his hearer, profoundly ignorant of what an Aldine might be, looked at him with an expression curiously compounded of contempt and awe. With such a recondite work open before him, John was usually discovered; and such a work lay open upon his table now. Shutting it up with a brusqueness which certes no genuine lover of old books had ever used before him, he thrust it away, and sitting down upon his mediæval chair, abandoned himself to a reverie.

Martha meanwhile had gone to Mary's room, and found her sitting, still undressed, before the fire.

"Did you notice?" Mary cried exultingly, her eyes bright with some secret triumph.

"Notice? What?" asked Martha.

"His agitation when I mentioned Linden-Grove Road?"

Martha's hands fell to her side, and she stood mute with surprise.

"You good old owl!" laughed Mary. "I believe you never saw it."

She was quite right. Martha had not only not seen, but was still a hundred miles from comprehension.

"What does it all mean?" she asked.

"Never you mind, Patty. You are not clever at keeping secrets. They always oppress you. Suffice it to say that in future I shall know how to manage my immaculate brother."

Too humble-minded to be inquisitive, Martha waited further information. But Mary continued to talk in riddles.

"I wonder," she said musingly, "if I dare pretend to know enough to extract money out of him?"

"He will not give it, I think," said Martha, and related what had passed. Mary's face fell. Either she did love this Ralph very much, or a girlish fancy had been fanned by need of excitement and the spirit of opposition into a flame.

"You could squeeze out some money for me yourself, Patty, if you chose."

"I?" Poor Martha had nothing of her own but a miserable £60 a-year. As generous as she was poor, she spent more than the half of it in charity or in gifts, and never had a spare sixpence by the time each quarter was a week old.

"I never knew anybody like you for being without a penny," said Mary, crossly, seeing the distress painted on her cousin's countenance. "You have the housekeeping money. Why cannot you give me £10 out of that?"

"Mary!"

"Mary? Well, Mary what?" mocked the owner of that name with considerable peevishness.

"It would be dishonest."

"Dishonest? Nonsense. I would give it you back next week."

"Next week or next year, the wrong would be the same," answered Martha softly, while a steadfast light came into her brown eyes.

"I think you are very unkind." Martha winced but sat silent. "Very unkind and obstinate, and puritanical and—and ridiculous," continued the baffled beauty, and thereupon burst into tears.

A sound of angry sobbing alone broke the silence for the next few minutes. Martha was weeping also, but silently. Pale and sorrowful, she sat brushing away the tears as they coursed one by one down her cheeks, feeling herself dreadfully cruel, and yet upheld by a firm instinct of duty.

"You have often been most tiresome, Martha; but never, I think, deliberately unkind until now."

"The refusal is—is w—worse for me to make than for y—you to hear," wailed Martha, and broke out sobbing in her turn.

Tears are generally supposed to be a sign of weakness. Mary thought she had triumphed, and passed from reproach to entreaty. But although Martha grew damper, limper, more wretched every moment, she persisted in her resolution, and Mary ended by flying into a violent rage. Then Martha, trembling all over, crushed and mute, rose and bid her humbly "Good night." She got no answer, unless the peevish tattoo of an angry foot could be called such. She stood for a moment looking imploringly at the averted head of her darling; then glided away and went down the passage to her own room, feeling as if she could never be happy in all her life again. Her affections were so fresh, her heart was so pure, her mind so

simple, that harsh words and angry looks affected her as they would a child.

For hours after she was in bed she tossed from side to side, wondering what she could do. At last she had an inspiration. She had one possession of value; her mother's diamond ring. On the morrow she would pawn that to Parsons' husband and say nothing of her intention until she had the money in her hand, when she would win her pardon from Mary's glad surprise. Enchanted, she fell asleep at last, a smile upon her lips. Dreams were kinder to her than men. In the magic land of shadows the spell of fear fell from her spirit; her faith forgot the chill of doubt, and her own heart's music silenced discord.

CHAPTER II.

DISCOVERIES.

ON reaching the station next morning to catch the first train, Martha was rather surprised to find John on the same errand. His journeys to London had grown frequent of late. Formerly one a month had, on an average, been enough for him. Now, hardly a week passed without his running up. Nevertheless, Martha had not expected to see him start again on this particular morning, for it was only on the previous afternoon that he had returned after a three days' absence.

Blind as a bat, as usual, she did not notice the slight shade of annoyance that crossed his face on perceiving her.

"Going shopping?" he inquired, carelessly, as he seated himself opposite to her.

She answered "Yes," rather quietly: for, as we know, shopping was not the only object of her journey.

"I am bound for the City," said he. "I suppose your destination is Oxford Street, and you will return by the two o'clock train?"

Martha thought she was quite sure to return at two o'clock, and said so.

"That will be too early for me," he remarked, as if the idea of accompanying her back had been the only reason of his question. And although railway speed was a much smaller thing in those days than it is in ours, he did not once again unclose his lips until the train steamed into the terminus.

Martha got through her shopping with the utmost haste, being eager to settle her business with Parsons. On descending at last from the Red Cap omnibus, and knocking at the door of the dingy house in the little street of shops that turned out of Linden-Grove Road, she was startled to find herself received by a weeping maid-of-all-work.

"What is the matter?" she asked, sympathetically, agitated always

at the sight of trouble, even though the sorrowful one was the grimiest of maidens that had ever scrubbed a doorstep.

"It's the missis, ma'am. She's in a faint. I thought you might have bin the doctor."

"Has a doctor not been?"

"No, ma'am, but he has sent to say he is coming. He's with a little boy in the Linden-Grove Road, who has got convulsions."

Martha, arriving upstairs, found the patient surrounded by her husband and one or two friendly female neighbours, who had resorted to such remedies as their simple science suggested. When the doctor presently made his appearance, Mrs. Parsons was quite sensible again, although so pale and exhausted that he feared a second attack. He recommended absolute quiet; and glanced analytically at the bystanders, with a view of discovering who among them was most likely to enforce the execution of his orders.

"You had better stay with her," he said, addressing Miss Freake. "Can you?"

"For a few hours," she replied, making up her mind to the loss of her afternoon.

"That's right. Then I will return in an hour or two. Should there be a relapse, and you want me in a hurry, you will most likely find me close by in Linden-Grove Road, No. 14. I have a bad case there, which requires watching."

As the illness of Mrs. Parsons has very little to do with our story, we may merely state that she had no second attack, and that about four o'clock Martha was able to leave her. Her husband, grateful to the little woman for her attention to the invalid, very quickly and liberally transacted the business of the ring, and Martha found herself the possessor of £10 and a pawn-ticket.

Greatly pleased with the success of her enterprise, she bid the sick woman good-bye, said a few kind words to everybody, and started forth bravely through the fog and drizzle for the Red Cap.

Her shortest way lay through Linden-Grove Road, and passing down that street, her tender heart reminded her of the little boy who, as the doctor had said, was so very ill. She began to wonder how he was, and peered about for No. 14. Not that she meant to go there, but she felt an interest in the house, knowing that a child's laughter had been hushed within its walls, and that sickness had stayed the busy tread of little feet and laid low a tiny head. "This must be No. 14," thought Martha, blinking through the mist. Yes—and surely that was the doctor who had just clinked open the garden-gate. He was coming away from a visit to his patient. She might give him news of Parsons, and ask him if the little boy were better.

She stopped at the gate with this intention. But the doctor did not notice her in the uncertain light, for he was speaking to a gentleman behind him.

"And you really think I can leave him with safety to-night?" asked a voice, whose tones rooted Martha to the ground with amazement.

"Indeed he is much better," replied the doctor. "Not only can you leave him, but I have impressed upon Mrs. Howard the necessity of seeking rest herself. She will break down entirely, otherwise."

"My wife is unfortunately of an anxious temperament," answered John: for John Hatherley it was who was leaning on the gate and saying these inconceivable things.

His wife? Martha with difficulty suppressed an exclamation of surprise and dismay. Surprise that John should be secretly married; dismay at the secrecy, and the consequent danger of detection. She shrank back into the shadow like a guilty thing, letting the doctor go past her unchallenged; and waited in a kind of dream until John's receding steps had died away upon the gravel walk.

Then she darted forward with but one idea, that of escape, nor did she breathe freely until she was once more seated in the omnibus and jolting back to the station; where she had to wait. The stupor of her recent discovery imprisoned her mind like a mould of lead, affecting her hardly less than if she had found John out in a crime. What kind of woman could he have married? And what would his father, what would everybody say, when discovery ensued? To our simple-minded Martha, steeped in the habits of the Hatherleys and imbued with their traditions, a clandestine marriage in connection with one of them seemed nothing less than highly improper. And how was she to behave under the weight of this astounding mystery? The thought of betraying John never presented itself to her. She was as loyal as she was loving; and in so far as silence could shield him, she was just as ready to stand by him now as in the old days, when he got into boyish scrapes, and her indulgent protection alone averted the birch. But surreptitious visits to the jam closet are one thing; a family hidden away in a remote suburb of London is another; and Martha nearly groaned aloud as she realised that all she could do for John now, her dear cousin, was to suffer for him in agonised silence and suspense.

Lest such feelings should seem exaggerated, it must be remembered that among the many believers in the Hatherley "legend," the staunchest, the most fervent, the most unquestioning, was Martha. No single thing ought to threaten the foundations of that rock of respectability: yet a clandestine connection implies something disgraceful.

She felt quite worn out with perplexity when she reached home at last, and was fairly past deriving any delight even from bestowing her £10 upon Mary.

"Where did you get it?" asked that young lady, surprise predominating over every other sentiment.

Martha, unable to fib, but blushing at the confession, ramblingly

recounted how she had pawned her mother's ring. Mary was touched, but not deeply, being accustomed to Martha's devotion.

"John has been to London again to-day," said Mary, kneeling down in front of her cousin, all her stateliness banished by secret exultation. "You saw him, I know, Martha. You came back in the same train with him."

"But not in the same carriage," replied Martha, who had indeed avoided John on her return, as though he had been plague-stricken.

"Was he alone at the London station—quite alone?" questioned Mary, with kindling eyes. "You say 'yes,' Patty, but you mumble the words in so odd a way that I vow I hardly believe you."

Martha cowered over the fire in silence. Did Mary know anything? And if so, how much?

"You are late," said John to her, presently, when he joined them in the room; and his eyes rested coldly on the meek little figure, almost as if he disapproved of her being still in her cloak and bonnet. "I thought you meant to return by the two o'clock train?"

"I—I was detained. It's—it's nearly dinner-time," stammered Martha, and hurried away, fearful of further questioning.

"One would almost think you had an interest in Martha's returning early," remarked Mary, looking straight into her brother's face.

"You are mistaken. Martha's movements have but a limited interest for me. I have never made her a confidante, nor employed her on clandestine errands," retorted John.

"Which means that I have," said Mary, tranquilly. "Union is strength, John. Why should you and I not make mutual confidences, with a view to mutual advantage?"

"You must demonstrate to me first the nature of the confidences which I could have to make," replied her brother, his marble face more inscrutable than ever.

She kept her eyes fixed on him for a space, then saying, "It will be your own fault if I am alienated," relapsed into silence.

It was a few weeks later that Martha and John found themselves alone at breakfast. The circumstance was not an unusual one, for Mr. Hatherley of course was never present, and Mary just now had reached that stage of a sentimental grievance which results in incapacity for all the minor tasks of life.

The post-bag had arrived, and John, after sorting the letters, was engaged in reading his own. He had handed the *Times* to his cousin, not for her own perusal, but to cut and smoothe for his, and if he thought of her at all, he probably supposed her to be taking the opportunity to glance at it. But Martha's mind, not intellectually inclined at the best of times, had no room in it at present for news of the Spanish marriages or any subjects of a kindred nature. Her eyes were fixed on John. Ever since the day of her exciting discovery, he had possessed a kind of fascination for her. Lately also,

certain circumstances had happened which had the effect of increasing Miss Freake's interest in him. His double existence as a bachelor in Marleyford, and a married man in London; his unaltered dignity and unruffled calm under the weight of such a fact, lifted him in her simple mind to an epic grandeur of audacity. She had fallen into the habit of watching him, quite unconscious of the annoyance it gave him and the sullen dislike which she was thus creating in his mind against her.

A thrill of absolute excitement ran through her now on noticing that one of John's letters seemed to cause him agitation. He changed colour visibly on reading the first lines, and turned hastily to the signature. That apparently did not afford him any satisfaction either, for he frowned angrily. Martha, her loving inquisitiveness fully roused, strained her short-sighted eyes in a vain endeavour to guess the nature of the communication. The writing was small and cramped —so much she could make out, and something in its general air had a queer, distorted kind of likeness to Mary's hand. This circumstance, which poor Martha had good cause to remember later, struck her now but for a passing moment, as a mere imperfect coincidence.

Convinced that the writing was a woman's, she was not slow in attributing it to the mysterious lady in Linden-Grove Road; and her imagination, always romantic, began to suggest a thousand possibilities. When John, rising at last, announced that he would have to go that day to London, and that he might not be back to dinner, Martha became more and more persuaded that some crisis had occurred in the clandestine establishment.

"If he would only tell me—trust to me! I might be of some use!" she thought pathetically, her glance following his tall figure, and affectionately dwelling on his inscrutable face.

"Thank ye! thank ye!" said John brusquely, as Martha, ridiculously too short, stood on tip-toe in a futile endeavour to help him with his great coat. He was cross and the attention bored him, while she lovingly excused all things in him, including petulance to herself.

He started for the door; then suddenly paused, and turned to address her.

"Martha, I hear Mr. Luscombe was here one day last week in my absence. Do you know why he came?" He asked the question with an air of great carelessness, but his eyes were watchful.

"Mr. Luscombe? He spoke with your father," murmured Martha, turning very red.

"Of course. But of what? Ah! I see you do not intend to enlighten me." And John, with a displeased expression, walked away.

Mr. Luscombe was the family lawyer, and he had of late paid one or two visits to Hatherley House. And Martha on her side had been rather oftener than usual to London. These two facts had reached John's knowledge and proved unwelcome. Her reserve did

not tend to put him in a better humour ; on the contrary, it increased the vague feeling of irritation against her that he had been conscious of for weeks.

John had hardly left the house, when Mary appeared. Her breakfast and letters were always taken up to her, and she did not generally come down until late. But on this occasion she had seemingly been only waiting for her brother's departure to descend. She was looking pale yet exultant, and her eyes were bright with excitement.

"Patty," she began, with the charming grace that she displayed at times, and that her cousin always found irresistible, "tell me, did John seem annoyed by anything this morning ?"

Martha was fain to admit that he did : and by dint of further questioning, Mary elicited the fact that it was a letter which had caused it.

"Patty, I want you to do me a favour," she said, later in the day.

"Anything you like, darling," replied her fervid and incautious slave.

"I wonder if I can trust you," continued Mary, contemplating her reflectively. "You make dreadful blunders sometimes, Patty."

Martha, oppressed by the consciousness of her stupidity, had nothing to say.

"I must risk it," said Mary, lowering her voice, confidentially. "I want you to go to the Post Office the day after to-morrow, and get a letter that will be lying there addressed to "X. Y. Z." You must bring it direct to me."

Mary had expected eager compliance, and was surprised to see no sign of it, but be met by silence. "Well ?" she exclaimed, impatiently.

Martha's face presented a study of contending emotions. This was the second time that Mary had made a request to her which she found it difficult to grant. She feared, her secret knowledge rendering her imaginative, that some trap was being laid for John, and to that she could not be a party.

"This which you beg of me to do, is it anything unworthy ?" she asked, shrinking from the question, even while she uttered it, because loth to hint at the shadow of evil in connection with Mary Hatherley.

That young lady became rather red, but also rather angry.

"You are so absurd of late," she exclaimed. "Of course it is nothing unworthy. Only a little piece of poetical justice ; fun, in fact. I—that is—a friend of mine and myself, we wish to give my saintly brother a fright."

Martha looked grave. "You must tell me more."

"To tell you would spoil the whole," said Mary petulantly. "If you don't go, I shall send some one else, and then there is no knowing what mischief may ensue. Any stranger sent on such an errand would think that some important secret is concerned, and might open the letter. He would talk : and only imagine the effect of such talking in Marleyford !"

Martha made no immediate reply. Mary's words had for her a greater force than the speaker could guess. She had not, it is true, an idea of the nature of the letter or of the measure to which it could affect John; and, on the other hand, she dared not question. She feared by interrogation to excite suspicion and illuminate facts still wrapped up in darkness.

"You cannot refuse me such a little favour, Patty," began Mary once more, caressingly. The coaxing tone went to her cousin's heart. Still she could not yield at once. Mary entreated, repeating again and again that the letter must be withdrawn, "if not by Martha, then by somebody else."

"If I bring you the letter, what will you do with it?" asked the yielding woman.

"Tear it up," answered Mary with a light laugh, that yet was a little forced.

"You promise," questioned Martha, looking at her earnestly.

"I promise," replied the girl: though her glance flickered.

Martha sighed. But love and anxiety for those she loved combined to vanquish her; and Mary, triumphant, finally extracted from her the promise that she would go.

But the day came, and Miss Freake went, no letter was forthcoming. Mary, much disappointed, insisted on her promise to go again at the end of another few days.

So one fine morning, when the air was balmy, although the trees were still leafless, and when crocuses and snowdrops had suddenly revealed themselves in all the gardens, Martha started off once more, the post-office her final destination. First she had many small errands of business and of charity to perform; some bills to pay, some bedridden crones to visit. Blither than usual, the cloud of humble depression that generally clung around her gentle spirit a little lifted, she trotted from place to place. Perhaps it was the soft, lovely weather that made her feel so bright; for Martha Freake was very sensitive to external impressions. Far more sensitive, indeed, than most people, looking carelessly at her crumpled little face under her dowdy bonnet, thought it worth while to guess. Poor simple, loving Martha!

At last she turned into the street where the post-office was; presented herself before the clerk, and asked for a letter addressed "X Y Z." It was handed out to her. With a spasm of surprise, she recognised the handwriting of the address for John's. Hastily thrusting the mysterious missive into her pocket, she turned and found herself face to face with a quiet-looking stranger. What he had to say to her, and what happened next, the curious reader will learn in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III.

THE WILL.

UPSTAIRS, in a warm, comfortable, remote room, where the bustle and stir of the household could not reach, Mr. Hatherley spent his days. They were monotonous, drowsy days, saddened by weakness and the sense of an imminent end.

The brewer had never possessed many mental resources: never had been a reading man, or made his son's pretensions to culture.

Now, as the gloom of weakness and of age gathered round his spirit, he had but one occupation. That was, to go over and over again in memory the details of long past business operations. His mind was very clear, but his vivid interest in present things as a rule had vanished. Generally silent and a little morose, rather than patient and resigned, he would flash out at intervals into energy or anger. And his intelligence on these occasions was still so keen, his views so decided, his will so swift and strong, that the whole household shrank from rousing the slumbering lion. His restless irritability and proportional sharpness of insight kept his children and servants on thorns, for the lightest word sufficed to annoy, and the faintest indication to enlighten him.

Late one afternoon he sat at his usual place by the fire, the landscape still dimly visible through the unshuttered windows. The reflection of the blaze on walls and furniture became ruddier by contrast with the shadows which it could only partially chase. The servant on bringing the lamp had been bidden to take it away again. Silently, almost humbly, he obeyed, for the day had been one of Mr. Hatherley's worst; and now he was supposed to have sunk into the semi-stupor which generally followed his outbursts of excitement.

He had a rugged, stern old face—the set face of a man who had known few although strong emotions and responded to fewer ideas. But now on the sunken cold lips a softer expression than usual dwelt. Once or twice the wrinkled hands trembled, and an open letter which they held rustled as in answer to some quiver of the aged frame.

"All in the dark, father?" exclaimed Mary, entering suddenly. "How careless of Jacobs!" And she rang the bell.

The old man did not seek to justify Jacobs, or to answer. He still seemed lost in thought. Mary glanced at him rather impatiently, and no quick instinct of love warned her of the subtle change in his air. Her mind was, as always, full of her own affairs. Earlier in the day she had almost decided to appeal to him for money; but his mood had been ungracious, and her courage failed.

When the lights were brought in, he roused himself a little, and, lifting his eyes, fixed them on his daughter with a singular, wistful look, almost of tenderness. She was startled—even shivered with a

vague awe. Never before had he so looked at her ; and recalling the mystic change that sometimes precedes death, she wondered whether it were some prescience of his end that now filled her father's eyes with that strange regretfulness.

She laid her hand on his wrinkled, trembling fingers, generally so nerveless, and felt them close kindly, although feebly, round her own.

" You are like your mother to-night, my dear, it seems to me," he said. " Or perhaps it is only that I have been living all day in the past."

" Can I do anything for you, father ? Is there anything you want ? " asked Mary, oppressed by the silence and by her own unwanted emotion. Her shallow nature could not long bear the strain of a painful feeling. She wished he would take those wan, solemn, regretful eyes from her face.

" I have thought of you a great deal to-day," he resumed, the senile trembling of his lips increasing as the slow words came through them ; " of you and Will. I have been reading his last letter ; that one in which he says he is about to marry. You remember ? "

" Yes ; you said it was certain to be a marriage to disgrace us," said Mary jealously, for there had been scant love between herself and her younger brother, and she had no desire to see him reinstated in her father's favour.

" Ay," answered Mr. Hatherley ; " I said so, I remember. But things seem different now. I should like him to be happier than he has been."

" He does not deserve much happiness that I can see," replied Mary, too angry now for tenderness.

" I have been unjust to him, and not generous to you, my dear. I was over-persuaded."

" By John ? " cried Mary, a sudden light breaking upon her.

" Yes," he answered musingly. " John is hard, but I thought him just, and I had faith in him until now. Lately — "

He paused, and his head drooped again. Mary was livid with excitement at the thought of the danger she had barely escaped—nay, which, perhaps, still hung over her head. Should she tell that secret something she knew of her brother, or would silence be wiser ? Resentment and self-interest alike urged her to speak.

" Father, I have a thing to tell you—a secret of John's," she said, grasping the old man's arm in the intensity of her eagerness.

He lifted his eyes to hers, but they had a wandering look which alarmed her. Were the shades of death already obscuring his tardily-awakened conscience ? Was he drifting away so fast that her touch could no longer detain, her voice no longer reach him ? In a spasm of fear she fell on her knees beside him.

" I should like to reverse the will," he murmured. " But perhaps I have no time."

The whispered, mournful words sickened Mary. What had he

done? Was she to be left penniless? Springing up, she hastily collected pens, ink, and paper. "Dictate!" she exclaimed. "I can write and you can sign it."

Once again succeeded a moment of that terrifying silence, during which, breathless, she leant forward and peered into his face. But it was the slow gathering together of his enfeebled faculties that made the pause; for suddenly he roused himself and in clear tones, with a steadfast look began to dictate.

"February 10th, 184—. Besides the minor legacies mentioned in my latest will, I leave to my daughter Mary, and to my son William, £30,000 each for their own exclusive use and benefit. The remainder of my real and personal estate I leave in the manner already set forth."

His voice ceased. Mary looked up. Before she could speak, he stretched out his hand towards the pen.

"Call Jacobs and Gregory as witnesses. Be quick, child. I think the sands are slipping fast."

She flew to the bell, and its summons not being answered rapidly enough for her impatience, sped down the staircase calling "Jacobs! Jacobs!" at the top of her voice.

"Quick!" she cried, when half-a-dozen startled servants came running. "Jacobs, come! Somebody call Gregory. Your master wants two witnesses to his signature to a will."

"A will? At the eleventh hour, as you may say, poor gentleman—what a freak!" commented Mrs. Hoare, the housekeeper, while she despatched an underling for Gregory, the gardener, and Jacobs followed his excited young mistress upstairs.

Mary, of course, was the first to gain the room, and then Jacobs heard her give a shrill cry of astonishment and dismay. On putting in his questioning countenance, Jacobs found Mr. Hatherley in his usual attitude by the fire, Mary standing speechless in the middle of the floor, and upon the hearth-rug, quietly warming himself, im-perturbably irreproachable, was—John!

The two servants, who had now come, could not take in the full meaning of the scene, for they felt that there was some mystery, and remained staring, silent and puzzled.

"What is the matter?" inquired John affably.

Jacobs looked at Gregory, and Gregory at him; after which, both directed glances at their young mistress. But she seemed dumbfounded, and vouchsafed not a word.

"Miss Mary said, sir, that we were wanted to witness a will," replied Jacobs respectfully.

"A will?" repeated John sharply. "What will? My father's? I think you are all mad."

Then Mary, beside herself, burst out. "I tell you the codicil was there on that table a codicil destroying your frauds. You have taken it. Give it back."

Her words came out in gasps. She was half-suffocated with an emotion which, in all her decorous life, she had never felt or shown before. At last she positively rushed at her brother, as if to wrest the truth from him ; but he seized her by the wrists and held her at arms' length, his cold contemptuous eyes scanning her face.

" You are disgracing yourself, Mary. You are dreaming. Where is the codicil ? Look for it," he concluded quietly.

Where was it indeed ?

Mary turned imperiously to her father, but even her anger shrank from questioning him ; for he was sitting back in his chair quite silent and still, with a fascinated look of horror in his eyes, and a trembling of his whole frame inexpressibly painful to see. The scene was evidently too much for his failing strength, and it was more than likely that whatever he knew he would not tell. On the floor was a crumpled sheet of paper. Mary pounced upon it, but threw it away again the next moment, on finding that it was only William's letter. Her hungry eyes turned to the fire, but no trace of any consumed document was there ; so again she faced her brother. He had never taken his gaze off her, and now spoke as calmly as before.

" You are convinced of your folly, I hope ? No ? Then I am tired of it, and I think the servants had better withdraw."

Gregory and Jacobs took the hint, and vanished. Mary cast herself upon a sofa, sobbing. John stood by with a gloomy frown. All at once, across the stormful silence, Mr. Hatherley spoke. " I wish," he said, slowly and distinctly, " to be left alone."

Both his children started with a momentary sense of remorse. The quiet command so feebly yet so authoritatively spoken, falling into the midst of their sordid self-absorption, was like a voice from the tomb.

" Come to your room," said John to his sister, who had stayed her sobs and risen. " I have to speak to you seriously, and we worry my father. You will ring for Hoare if you want her, sir :" and John, after a keen, dissatisfied glance, crossed the room and bolted the door communicating with the servants' staircase.

Signing to Mary to follow him, he led the way to her bed-room, and closed the door. " It is nearly dinner-time," he began. " Has it struck you as strange that Martha should still be out ? "

Martha ? The subject was so unexpected at that moment, that Mary absolutely stared. " I have had other things on my mind," she replied sullenly.

" She did not return to lunch, and she will not be here to dinner," said John. " It seems you have heard nothing ? "

" Nothing at all ; nobody has called to-day," answered Mary slowly, looking at him with a growing feeling of disaster. She did not wish to ask what had happened ; but he remained silent, and she could not bear the suspense.

" Where is Martha ? "

"In jail."

Mary shrieked. The words were like a stab. But even then it was the blow to herself of the announcement which she felt most of all.

"Cruel! cruel!" she cried, and covered her face with her hands.

"The cruelty belongs to the person who sent her on a felonious errand," retorted John. "I was amazed when I heard of it. Mr. Ormerod called himself at the brewery about it, twice. The first time I was out; and this and other delays made it impossible to get her out on bail to-day. But to-morrow, when she is brought up for examination, I shall of course do what I can for her, although I am myself the prosecutor."

Mary sat listening, half-stunned, to the cold, commonplace words; commonplace in their meaning, and as John uttered them, but tragic in their significance to her. Two questions kept recurring constantly to her, beating against her brain like hammers. "What would happen to herself? and what to Ralph?"

"Do you wish Martha to remain under this charge?" he asked.

"I?" she repeated faintly.

"She has only been your tool: and, as I believe, your innocent tool," continued John. "If I state this conviction before the magistrates to-morrow, she will be discharged."

Mary wrung her hands. All the consequences to herself were beginning to dawn upon her.

"I need not point out that disgrace will fall on you, even though you are not arrested as Ralph Mercer's accomplice," he pursued unrelentingly. But if Mary had not brains she had some courage, and his tone stung her to revolt.

"You are trying to frighten me with your talk of felony and punishment, John. But after all, what the letter said was perfectly true. You have a clandestine establishment and you wish to keep it a secret."

"That is quite true. But the mistake you and Ralph made was in menacing me, supposing that I would pay a large price for the secret to be kept." Mary started. This was a new aspect of the question.

"To my wife, herself (for the lady in Linden-Grove Road is my wife), nobody could make any objection. But I will not conceal from you that there are circumstances connected with her which might render my father angry at the marriage —"

"And leave you out of his will," interrupted Mary, with scorn.

"Precisely."

His coolness exasperated her. Her eyes flashed, and she was about to make some angry observation when he raised his hand to impose silence.

"Let us talk frankly, Mary. If I am in your power to a degree of which, observe, you are ignorant, you are in my power to an extent of which I am fully aware. Martha, poor soul, between bewilderment

and loyalty, said very little to-day, and nothing that could compromise you. But she evidently counts upon you to release her from her present position, and it is impossible to say how long her silence may last when she finds herself mistaken. Her story, to the prejudiced ears of Marleyford—prejudiced in our favour,” said John, with an air of sardonic satisfaction—“will probably at first strike everybody as wildly improbable, but its ultimate acceptance will largely depend upon me. If I state my conviction that my cousin was my sister’s cat’s-paw, I fancy our kind neighbours and friends will, one and all, accept the succulent morsel of scandal whole. Martha will be pitied as a victim and exalted as a martyr; I shall bring my wife, her existence no longer a secret, in triumph home; while you, my dear—well! I leave you to imagine the figure, more novel than edifying, that you will cut.”

Mary was speechless with dismay and rage. In the last few minutes she had lived through a decade of mental experience. She saw her respectability in men’s eyes—that elaborate fabric built up of family tradition and personal pride—threatened to its foundations; she was frightened for her lover, frightened for herself, a little remorseful about Martha; and aghast, to the point of pain, at the unexpected revelation of her brother’s true character.

“I—I declare I do not know you,” she exclaimed.

“You do not know me because this is the first time in our lives that the clash of antagonistic interests has brought out the essential difference between us. If you will have confidence in me—good. If not, Mary, you will have nobody but yourself to blame for anything unpleasant that may happen to you.”

Her nerves irritated by his stern composure, his calm superiority, Mary again sought refuge in tears. He let her sob for a little while. “Now, Mary, for the question of the money. I have just detected you in the attempt to obtain a codicil by undue influence.”

“My father volunteered to make it,” she flashed out, restored to some momentary energy.

“The proof? Let me tell you that a codicil in your own favour and *your own handwriting*, would look very suspicious in the eyes of the law. And why do you object to the original will?”

“For aught I know I am disinherited,” she said, falling into the trap laid for her, and betraying her real ignorance of her father’s intentions.

John indulged in a smile of quiet triumph; and as he had learnt all he needed to know, he was gratified at this moment to hear the clash of the gong.

“Seven o’clock, I declare! Come, Mary, dry your eyes, and be reasonable. You will certainly make ducks and drakes of any money which is left you; but at the same time, if it be any comfort to you to know that you will not starve, of that I can assure you. You are in a hole, and so is Ralph, for that affair of the letter is criminal; but

if I am pleased with you, I will stand your friend. And we will get Martha off also—call her insane, perhaps."

Cowed afresh by this reiteration of the danger hanging over her, Mary rose, sulkily, but obediently, and accompanied her brother downstairs. There the respectful Jacobs was waiting for them, and the dinner began in its usual form.

But it was not destined to be thus concluded. All at once the silent brother and sister were startled by the sound of a heavy fall in the room above, which was Mr. Hatherley's sitting-room. They looked at one another with questioning eyes, and John half rose from his seat, listening.

At this moment in rushed Mrs. Hoare, pale and scared. "Oh, sir! the master! . . . he is lying insensible! . . . I think he is dead."

When the son and daughter reached their father's side, they found him lost to all consciousness, but still breathing. The doctor, summoned in haste, pronounced the attack to be a fresh seizure, and declared his conviction that it was destined to be the last; which sent the whole house into a commotion.

In point of fact, the old man never rallied, and, just when the dawn was breaking, he went. John was calm, but grave and attentive; Mary, shattered with fatigue, and worn out by a quick succession of emotions, quite subdued.

"Now, don't take on, my dear," said Mrs. Hoare, forgetting something of her acquired respect in her native motherliness. "What is it you say? If he had only spoken again? Well, well, the ways of Providence are mysterious. And it is quite certain the poor gentleman loved you, and if he had been unjust, his intention was likely to remedy it. Or I should not have found him standing where I did," concluded the good woman, smoothing her apron with a casual air.

"What do you mean?" asked Mary, raising her tear-stained face.

"You heard the fall? Yes. Well, I had gone into the room that instant. Poor master, he was standing by his writing-table, with his hand on the very drawer from which Mr. John has just carried a bundle of documents into his own room. He turned as I came in and said, 'Mrs. Hoare,' he says, 'later this evening, when Jacobs is free—' Then he stopped. 'Yes, sir?' says I, thinking he had only just stopped to reflect, may be. But he stood like a statue—his hand just raised. Miss, it was awful. It was as if he was listening to a distant voice. Then all at once his poor face was drawn, he gave a little gasp, and before I could catch him he had fallen in a heap upon the floor. And, Miss Mary, he never spoke again."

This story of Mrs. Hoare's preoccupied Mary. She, as well as the housekeeper, had seen John remove a bundle of papers from a drawer of his father's writing-table and take them to his own room. Was the codicil among these? If so, John's first care would of course be to destroy it. Mary knew that an unsigned codicil was not of

much legal value, but a thought, sharpened by resentment, suggested to her that it might be of some use in enabling her to dispute her father's will, should that prove, as she feared, too flagrantly unjust. What was her father doing at the writing-table when Mrs. Hoare found him there? In the state of inertness and weakness in which he was, he must have had some strong motive to impel him to the exertion of creeping across the room. Perhaps he had had possession of the codicil all the time and had taken advantage of being alone to conceal it, intending to get the servants to witness it later.

All at once it flashed across Mary's mind that this writing-table of her father's possessed a curious secret drawer. Ralph Mercer had told her of it. He had heard of it from William Hatherley, who, coming unexpectedly once into his father's study, had caught sight of it ere the old man had hastily and furtively closed it. William confessed to having taken an occasion to look for it, but in spite of many shakings and rappings he had been completely baffled. And the one chance which enabled him to make his search had never repeated itself. William, wisely distrustful of his brother, had carefully kept from him all knowledge of his discovery, although to his "chum," Ralph, he had been frank. Mary, recalling all this, asked herself: Could the codicil be there? She longed to find it, unable to believe that it would not be of some use.

John had gone out in the course of the morning about the necessary arrangements, and except for the servants she was alone in the house. The opportunity was too good to be lost, and she went to the rooms where her father had spent his last sad and silent months. A little shudder of awe came over her as she glanced at the fireless hearth, the empty arm-chair, at all the familiar unchanged objects whose special use was gone. With a superstitious shrinking she softly closed the door, left ajar, of the darkened bed-room, where lay the still presence so full of rebuke in its unconscious majesty; and then she began her search.

But it was as fruitless now for her, as it had ever been for William: she could not hit upon the secret of the drawer. Such papers as she found she scanned eagerly, but there were none of any importance: John had taken care of that. Feeling herself foiled, Mary leant her face upon her hands and began to weep silently. She was thoroughly exhausted, and felt dreadfully sorry for herself. She recalled the touch of new kindness towards her in her father's tone and manner the day before, and sobbed bitterly. Nobody was ever so lonely as she: even Martha was not there to comfort her: she had been taken into custody on suspicion of having written the threatening letter.

Selfishly confiding in John's assurance that Martha could be "got off somehow," Mary had dismissed as much as possible from her mind the thought of Miss Freake's present position. Now it recurred to her, and with it a sense of her own baseness. She was just in one of those moods when to think oneself vile seems equal to

a return to virtue. Crossness with the world produced in Mary an inclination to defy it. It would be grand of her, and it would startle Marleyford, if she were publicly to proclaim Martha's innocence and her own guilt. She began to rehearse the scene in her mind. She would appear before the magistrates, looking very interesting in her mourning, and in clear tones she would state the truth. She could not be punished very severely after that; John would be defrauded of his intention of putting her down; Mrs. Hoare's story would help her in threatening to dispute the will. John would have to compound for a large sum of money; and she—well, she and Ralph would marry and take the grateful Martha home to live with them. The picture was charming. It quite cheered her, and she rose to her feet with a sense of heroism.

But a thought intervened. Had not John said that Martha would be brought up again before the magistrates this very morning? In that case the time for action was *now*. This check, like a brigand with a cocked pistol on a lonely road, brought Mary up rather suddenly. She still felt inspired, only inspired for some less definite epoch—perhaps to-morrow or next day. While she hesitated and began to get rather ill-tempered, Jacobs knocked at the door. The diversion was a relief. "Come in," she said.

"Mr. Russell is in the library, Miss Mary. He wishes to know if he can do anything for you."

"I will see him," said Mary: and, as well as the lowered blinds would allow, she scanned herself in the glass to see if her tears had disfigured her. She did not care for Walter Russell; but it was gratifying to know that he was devoted to her, more especially as everybody admired him, and wondered why she did not prefer him to Ralph Mercer. As she went downstairs it occurred to her that perhaps she might make her first confession about Martha to him. It would be a pretty scene—she remorseful, more sinned against than sinning; he touched and tender and very indulgent. He would smooth her after-path, and stand between her and blame.

Paler than usual, with a graver but a gentler manner and an air of lovely languor, she entered the library and responded to Mr. Russell's moved and eager greeting. Her stateliness always impressed him, and now that it was informed with this new graciousness he found it irresistible.

"I fear you are very sad," he said kindly, and held her hand. Mary sighed. She had a retrospective vision of herself as she had been ten minutes previously in her father's room, and felt that she was indeed very, very sad.

"I am glad you came. I was upstairs," she murmured; and Walter, who understood her, pressed her hand sympathizingly.

"You are well?" said Mary, looking at him with a keener appreciation than usual of his refined and intelligent air. "And your little cousin, Sir Charles's son, how is he?"

"He is, I fear, dying," replied Walter gravely.

"Dying?" Mary was startled. If the boy died, Walter would be heir-presumptive to a baronetcy. Her opinion of him rose considerably.

"I am afraid there is very little chance for the poor child, but I did not come here to talk of my own affairs," he said. "I want to know, Miss Hatherley, if I can be of any service to you. I have been so shocked to hear, not only of your loss, but of this terrible business of Miss Freake's. Surely there must be some mistake?"

Mary's heart seemed to stand still. Now was her opportunity; now or never. She felt that her next words would seal her fate, as a soul with some possibility of redemption or as the basest of liars.

There are these unchronicled crises in life that count for more than death or ruin. Mary Hatherley felt herself in the grip of a grim reality. The act of justice which, dressed in fantastic guise, had seemed easy of accomplishment an instant before, now stared at her with a terrible earnestness out of Mr. Russell's honest eyes. Never until this moment had she realized her folly, or felt that it was irrevocable. With a sob of impotent anger against herself and everybody, that admirably simulated pain, she bowed her head upon her arms and gave up truth for ever.

(To be continued.)



THE CHRISTMAS ANGELS.

Lo, the festival is ready! wake the bells to merry madness,

Hang aloft the shining garlands, lift aloud your voices, while
The fingers of a master bid the organ soar to gladness,

And roll triumphant peans down the nave and pillared aisle.
But in vain we raise the anthem, in vain we twine the holly,

Even mirth will pall upon us ere its echoes shall have ceased,
For groundless are the revels, and too near akin to folly,

If the holy Christmas angels be not bidden to the feast.

Do you know them, O my sister? their eyes are full of pity

For the suffering and the fallen that around thy pathway throng.
Do you hear them, O my brother? through the hubbub of the city,

They whisper "Quench thine anger, and forgive the cherished wrong!"
'Tis no wayward flight of fancy that sweet and unseen faces

Are watching every homestead, the greatest and the least;
In the meanest one among them, and in the world's high places,

Let the holy Christmas angels be bidden to the feast.

SYDNEY GREY.

THE EBONY BOX.

IN one or two of the papers already written for you, I have spoken of "Lawyer Cockermuth," as he was usually styled by his fellow townspeople at Worcester. I am now going to tell of something that happened in his family; that actually did happen, and is no invention of mine.

Lawyer Cockermuth's house stood in the Foregate Street. He had practised in it for a good many years; he had never married, and his sister lived with him. She had been christened Betty; it was a more common name in those days than it is in these. There was a younger brother named Charles. They were tall, wiry men with long arms and legs. John, the lawyer, had a smiling, homely face; Charles was handsome, but given to be choleric.

Charles had served in the militia once, and had been ever since called Captain Cockermuth. When only twenty-one he married a young lady with a good bit of money; he had also a small income of his own; so he abandoned the law, to which he had been bred, and lived as a gentleman in a pretty little house on the outskirts of Worcester. His wife died in the course of a few years, leaving him with one child, a son, named Philip. The interest of Mrs. Charles Cockermuth's money would be enjoyed by her husband until his death, and then would go to Philip.

When Philip left school he was articled to his uncle, Lawyer Cockermuth, and took up his abode with him. Captain Cockermuth (who was of a restless disposition, and fond of roving), gave up his house then and went travelling about. Philip Cockermuth was a very nice steady young fellow, and his father was liberal to him in the way of pocket-money, allowing him a guinea a week. Every Monday morning Lawyer Cockermuth handed (for his brother) to Philip a guinea in gold; the coin being in use then. Philip spent most of this in books, but he saved some of it; and by the time he was of age he had sixty golden guineas put aside in a small round black box of carved ebony. "What are you going to do with it, Philip?" asked Miss Cockermuth, as he brought it down from his room to show her. "I don't know what yet, Aunt Betty," said Philip, laughing, "I call it my nest-egg."

He carried the little black box (the sixty guineas quite filled it), back to his chamber and put it back into one of the pigeon-holes of the old-fashioned bureau which stood in the room, where he always kept it, and left it there, the bureau locked as usual. After that time, Philip put his spare money, now increased by a salary, into the Old Bank; and it chanced that he did not again look at the ebony box of gold,

never supposing but that it was safe in its hiding-place. On the occasion of his marriage some years later, he laughingly remarked to Aunt Betty that he must now take his box of guineas into use; and he went up to fetch it. The box was not there.

Consternation ensued. The family flocked upstairs; the lawyer, Miss Betty, and the captain—who had come to Worcester for the wedding and was staying in the house—one and all put their hands into the deep, dark pigeon-holes, but failed to find the box. The captain, a hot-tempered man, flew into a passion and swore over it; Miss Betty shed tears; Lawyer Cockermuth, always cool and genial, shrugged his shoulders and absolutely joked. None of them could form the slightest notion as to how the box had gone or who was likely to have taken it, and it had to be given up as a bad job.

Philip was married the next day, and left his uncle's house for good, having taken one out Barbourne way. Captain Cockermuth felt very sore about the loss of the box, he strode about Worcester talking of it, and swearing that he would send the thief to Botany Bay if he could find him.

A few years more yet, and poor Philip became ill. Ill of the disorder which had carried off his mother—decline. When Captain Cockermuth heard that his son was lying sick, he being (as usual) on his travels, he hastened to Worcester and took up his abode at his brother's—always his home on these visits. The disease was making very quick progress indeed; it was what is called “rapid decline.” The captain called in all the famed doctors of the town—if they had not been called before: but there was no hope.

The day before Philip died, his father spoke to him about the box of gold. It had always seemed to the captain that Philip must have, or ought to have, *some* notion of how it went. And he put the question to him again, solemnly, for the last time.

“Father,” said the dying man—who retained all his faculties and his speech to the very end—“I declare to you that I have none. I have never been able to set up any idea at all upon the loss, or attach suspicion to a soul, living or dead. The two maids were honest; they would not have touched it; the clerks had no opportunity of going upstairs. I had always kept the key safely, and you know that we found the lock of the bureau had not been tampered with.”

Poor Philip died. His widow and four children went to live at a pretty cottage on Malvern Link—upon a hundred pounds a year, supplied to her by her father-in-law. Mr. Cockermuth added the best part of another hundred. These matters settled, Captain Cockermuth set off on his rovings again, considering himself hardly used by Fate at having his limited income docked of nearly half its value. And yet some more years passed on.

This much has been by way of introduction to what has to come. It was best to give it.

Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson, our neighbours at Dyke Manor, had a

whole colony of nephews, what with brothers' sons and sisters' sons ; of nieces also ; batches of them would come over in relays to stay at Elm Farm, which had no children of its own. Samson Dene was the favourite nephew of all ; his mother was sister to Mr. Jacobson, his father was dead. Samson Reginald Dene he was christened, but most people called him "Sam." He had been articled to the gentleman who took to his father's practice ; a lawyer in a village in Oxfordshire. Later, he had gone to a firm in London for a year, had passed, and then came down to his uncle at Elm Farm, asking what he was to do next. For, upon his brother-in-law's death, Mr. Jacobson had taken upon himself the expenses of Sam, the eldest son.

"Want to know what you are to do now, eh ?" cried old Jacobson, who was smoking his evening pipe by the wide fire of the dark-wainscoated, handsome dining parlour, one evening in February. He was a tall, portly man with a fresh-coloured, healthy face ; and not, I dare say, far off sixty years old. "What would you like to do ?—what is your own opinion upon it, Sam ?"

"I should like to set up in practice for myself, uncle."

"Oh, indeed ! In what quarter of the globe, pray ?"

"In Worcester. I have always wished to practise at Worcester. It is the Assize town : I don't care for pettifogging places : one can't get on in them."

"You'd like to emerge all at once into a full-blown lawyer there ? That's your notion, is it, Sam ?"

Sam made no answer. He knew by the tone his notion was being laughed at.

"No, my lad. When you have been in some good office for another year or two maybe, then you might think about setting-up. The office can be in Worcester if you like."

"I am hard upon twenty-three, Uncle Jacobson. I have as much knowledge of law as I need."

"And as much steadiness also, perhaps ?" said old Jacobson.

Sam turned as red as the crimson table-cover. He was a frank-looking, slender young fellow of middle height, with fine wavy hair almost a gold colour and worn of a decent length. The present fashion—to be cropped as if you were a prison-bird and to pretend to like it so—was not favoured by gentlemen in those days.

"You may have been acquiring a knowledge of law in London, Sam ; I hope you have ; but you've been kicking up your heels over it. What about those sums of money you've more than once got out of your mother ?"

Sam's face was a deeper red than the cloth now. "Did she tell you of it, uncle ?" he gasped.

"No, she didn't ; she cares too much for her graceless son to betray him. I chanced to hear of it, though."

"One has to spend so much in London," murmured Sam, in lame apology.

"I dare say! In my past days, sir, a young man had to cut his coat according to his cloth. We didn't rush into all kind of random games and then go to our fathers or mothers to help us out of them. Which is what you've been doing, my gentleman?"

"Does aunt know?" burst out Sam in a fright, as a step was heard on the stairs.

"I've not told her," said Mr. Jacobson, listening—"she is gone on into the kitchen. How much is it that you've left owing in London, Sam?"

Sam nearly choked. He did not perceive this was just a random shot: he was wondering whether magic had been at work.

"Left owing in London?" stammered he.

"That's what I asked. How much? And I mean to know. 'Twon't be of any use your fencing about the bush. Come! tell it in a lump."

"Fifty pounds would cover it all, sir," said Sam, driven by desperation into the avowal.

"I want the truth, Sam."

"That is the truth, uncle, I put it all down in a list before leaving London; it comes to just under fifty pounds."

"How could you be so wicked as to contract it?"

"There has not been much wickedness about it," said Sam, miserably, "indeed there hasn't. One gets drawn into expense unconsciously in the most extraordinary manner up in London. Uncle Jacobson, you may believe me or not, when I say that till I added it up, I did not think it amounted to twenty pounds in all."

"And then you found it to be fifty! How do you propose to pay this?"

"I intend to send it up by instalments, as I can."

"Instead of doing which, you'll get into deeper debt at Worcester. If it's Worcester you go to."

"I hope not, uncle. I shall do my best to keep out of debt. I mean to be steady."

Mr. Jacobson filled a fresh pipe, and lighted it with a spill from the mantel-piece. He did not doubt the young fellow's intentions; he only doubted his resolution.

"You shall go into some lawyer's office in Worcester for two years, Sam, when we shall see how things turn out," said he presently. "And, look here, I'll pay these debts of yours myself, provided you promise me not to get into trouble again.—There, no more"—interrupting Sam's grateful looks—"your aunt's coming in."

Sam opened the door for Mrs. Jacobson. A little pleasant-faced woman in a white net cap, with small flat silver curls under it. She carried a small basket lined with blue silk, in which lay her knitting.

"I've been looking to your room, my dear, to see that all's comfortable for you," she said to Sam, as she sat down by the table and

the candles. "That new housemaid of ours is not altogether to be trusted. I suppose you've been telling your uncle all about the wonders of London."

"And something else, too," put in old Jacobson gruffly. "He wanted to set up in practice for himself at Worcester: off-hand, red-hot!"

"Oh dear!" said Mrs. Jacobson.

"That's what the boy wanted, nothing less. No. Another year or two's work in some good house, to acquire stability and experience, and then he may talk about setting up. It will be all for the best, Sam; trust me."

"Well, uncle, perhaps it will." It was of no use for him to say perhaps it won't: he could not help himself. But it was a disappointment.

Mr. Jacobson walked over to Dyke Manor the next day, to consult the Squire as to the best lawyer to place Sam with, himself suggesting their old friend Cockermuth. He described all Sam's wild ways (it was how he put it) in that dreadful place, London, and the money he had got out of amidst its snares. The Squire took up the matter with his usual hearty sympathy, and quite agreed that no practitioner in the law could be so good for Sam as John Cockermuth.

John Cockermuth proved to be agreeable. He was getting to be an elderly man then, but was active as ever, save when a fit of the gout took him. He received young Dene in his usual cheery manner, upon the day appointed for his entrance, and assigned him his place in the office next to Mr. Parslet. Parslet had been there more than twenty years; he was, so to say, at the top and tail of all the work that went on in it, but he was not a qualified solicitor. Samson Dene was qualified, and could therefore represent Mr. Cockermuth before the magistrates and what not: of which the old lawyer expected to find the benefit.

"Where are you going to live?" he questioned of Sam that first morning.

"I don't know yet, sir. Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson are about the town now, I believe, looking for lodgings for me. Of course they couldn't let me look; they'd think I should be taken in," added Sam.

"Taken in and done for," laughed the lawyer. "I should not wonder but Mr. Parslet could accommodate you. Can you, Parslet?"

Mr. Parslet looked up from his desk, his thin cheeks flushing. He was small and slight, with weak brown hair, and had a patient, sad sort of look in his face and in his meek, dark eyes.

James Parslet was one of those men who are said to spoil their own lives. Left alone early, he was looked after by a bachelor uncle, a minor canon of the cathedral, who perhaps tried to do his duty by him in a mild sort of manner. But young Parslet liked to go his own ways, and they were not very good ways. He did not stay at any calling he was put to, trying first one and then another; either

the people got tired of him, or he of them. Money (when he got any) burnt a hole in his pocket, and his coats grew shabby and his boots dirty. "Poor Jamie Parslet! how he has spoilt his life!" cried the town, shaking its pitying head at him: and thus things went on till he grew to be nearly thirty years of age. Then, to the public astonishment, Jamie pulled up. He got taken on by Lawyer Cockermuth as copying clerk at twenty shillings a week, married, and became as steady as Old Time. He had been nothing but steady from that day to this, had forty shillings a week now, instead of twenty, and was ever a meek, subdued man, as if he carried about with him a perpetual repentance for the past, regret for the life that might have been. He lived in Edgar Street, which is close to the cathedral, as everybody knows, Edgar Tower being at the top of it. An old gentleman attached to the cathedral had now lodged in his house for ten years, occupying the drawing-room floor; he had recently died, and hence Lawyer Cockermuth's suggestion.

Mr. Parslet looked up. "I should be happy to, sir," he said; "if our rooms suited Mr. Dene. Perhaps he would like to look at them?"

"I will," said Sam. "If my uncle and aunt do not fix on any for me."

Is there any subtle mesmeric power, I wonder, that influences things unconsciously? Curious to say, at this very moment Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson were looking at these identical rooms. They had driven into Worcester with Sam very early indeed, so as to have a long day before them, and when breakfast was over at the inn, took the opportunity, which they very rarely got, of slipping into the cathedral to hear the beautiful ten o'clock service. Coming out the cloister way when it was over, and so down Edgar Street, Mrs. Jacobson espied a card in a window with "Lodgings" on it. "I wonder if they would suit Sam?" she cried to her husband. "Edgar Street is a nice, wide, open street, and quiet. Suppose we look at them?"

A young servant-maid, called by her mistress "Sally," answered the knock. Mrs. Parslet, a capable, bustling woman of ready speech and good manners, came out of the parlour, and took the visitors to the floor above. They liked the rooms and they liked Mrs. Parslet; they also liked the moderate rent asked, for respectable country people in those days did not live by shaving one another; and when it came out that the house's master had been clerk to Lawyer Cockermuth for twenty years, they settled the matter off-hand, without the ceremony of consulting Sam. Mrs. Jacobson looked upon Sam as a boy still. Mr. Jacobson might have done the same but for the debts made in London.

And all this, you will say, has been yet more explanation; but I could not help it. The real thing begins now, with Sam Dene's sojourn in Mr. Cockermuth's office, and his residence in Edgar Street.

The first Sunday of his stay there, Sam went out to attend the morning service in the Cathedral, congratulating himself that that grand edifice stood so conveniently near, and looking, it must be confessed, a bit of a dandy, for he had put a little bunch of spring violets into his coat, and "button-holes" were quite out of the common way then. The service began with the Litany, the earlier service of prayers being held at eight o'clock. Sam Dene has not yet forgotten that day, for it is no imaginary person I am telling you of, and never will forget it. The Reverend Allen Wheeler chanted, and the prebendary in residence (Somers Cocks) preached. While wondering when the sermon (a very good one) would be over, and thinking it rather prosy, after the custom of young men, Sam's roving gaze was drawn to a young lady sitting in the long seat opposite to him on the other side of the choir, whose whole attention appeared to be given to the preacher, to whom her head was turned. It is a nice face, thought Sam; such a sweet expression in it. It really was a nice face, rather pretty, gentle and thoughtful, a patient look in the dark brown eyes. She had on a well-worn dark silk, and a straw bonnet; all very quiet and plain; but she looked very much of a lady. Wonder if she sits there always? thought Sam.

Service over, he went home, and was about to turn the handle of the door to enter (looking another way) when he found it turned for him by somebody who was behind and had stretched out a hand to do it. Turning quickly he saw the same young lady.

"O, I beg your pardon," said Sam, all at sea; "did you wish to come in here?"

"If you please," she answered—and her voice was sweet and her manner modest.

"O," repeated Sam, rather taken aback at the answer. "You did not want me, did you?"

"Thank you, it is my homé," she said.

"Your home?" stammered Sam, for he had not seen the ghost of anybody in the house yet, save his landlord and landlady and Sally. "Here?"

"Yes. I am Maria Parslet."

He stood back to let her enter; a slender, gentle girl of middle height; she looked about eighteen, Sam thought (she was that and two years on to it), and he wondered where she had been hidden. He had to go out again, for he was invited to dine at Lawyer Cocker-muth's, so he saw no more of the young lady that day; but she kept dancing about in his memory. And somehow she so fixed herself in it, and as the time went on so grew in it, and at last so filled it, that Sam may well hold that day as a marked day—the one that introduced him to Maria Parslet. But that is anticipating.

On the Monday morning all his ears and eyes were alert, listening and looking for Maria. He did not see her; he did not hear a sound of her. By degrees he got to learn that the young lady was

resident teacher in a lady's school hard by ; and that she was often allowed to spend the whole of the day at home on Sundays. One Sunday evening he ingeniously got himself invited to take tea in Mrs. Parslet's parlour, and thus became acquainted with Maria ; but his opportunities for meeting her were rare.

There's not much to tell of the first twelvemonth. It passed in due course. Sam Dene was fairly steady. He made a few debts, as some young men, left to themselves, can't help making—at least, they'd tell you they can't. Sundry friends of Sam's in Worcester knew of this, and somehow it reached Mr. Cockermuth's ears, who gave Sam a word of advice privately.

This was just as the first year expired. According to agreement, Sam had another year to stay. He entered upon it with inward gloom. On adding up his scores, which he deemed it as well to do after his master's lecture, he again found that they amounted to far more than he had thought for, and how he should contrive to pay them out of his own resources he knew no more than the man in the moon. In short, he could not do it ; he was in a fix ; and lived in perpetual dread of its coming to the ears of his Uncle Jacobson.

The spring assize, taking place early in March, was just over ; the judges had left the town for Stafford, and Worcester was settling down again to quietness. Miss Cockermuth gave herself and her two handmaidens a week's rest—assize time being always a busy and bustling period at the lawyer's, no end of chance company looking in—and then the house began its spring cleaning, a grand institution with our good grandmothers, often lasting a couple of weeks. This time, at the lawyer's house, it was to be a double bustle ; for visitors were being prepared for.

It had pleased Captain Cockermuth to write word that he should be at home for Easter ; upon which, the lawyer and his sister decided to invite Philip's widow and her children also to spend it with them ; they knew Charles would be pleased. Easter Day was very early indeed that year, falling at the end of March.

To make clearer what's coming, the house had better have a word or two of description. You entered from the street into a wide-passage ; no steps. On the left was the parlour and general sitting-room, in which all meals were generally taken. It was a long, low room, its two rather narrow windows looking to the street, the back of the room being a little dark. Opposite the door was the fire place. On the other side the passage, facing the parlour door, was the door that opened to the two rooms (one front, one back) used as the lawyer's office. The kitchens and staircase were at the back of the passage, a garden lying beyond ; and there was a handsome drawing-room on the first floor, not much used.

The house, I say, was in a commotion with the spring cleaning, and the other preparations. To accommodate so many visitors

required contrivance: a bed-room for the Captain, a bed-room for his daughter-in law, two bed-rooms for the children. Mistress and maids held momentous consultations together.

"We have decided to put the three little girls in Philip's old room, John," said Miss Betty to her brother, as they sat in the parlour after dinner on the Monday evening of the week preceding Passion Week; "and little Philip can have the small room off mine. We shall have to get in a child's bed, though; I can't put the three little girls in one bed; they might get fighting. John, I do wish you'd sell that old bureau for what it will fetch."

"Sell the old bureau!" exclaimed Mr. Cockermuth.

"I'm sure I should. What good does it do? Unless that bureau goes out of the room we can't put the extra bed in. I've been in there half the day with Susan and Ann, planning and contriving, and we find it can't be done any way. Do let Ward take it away, John; there's no place for it in the other chambers. He'd give you a fair price for it, I dare say."

Miss Betty had never cared for this piece of furniture, thinking it more awkward than useful: she looked eagerly at her brother, awaiting his decision. She was the elder of the two; tall, like him; but while he maintained his thin, wiry form, just the shape of an upright gas post with arms, she had grown stout with no shape at all. Miss Betty had dark thick eyebrows and an amiable red face. She wore a "front" of brown curls with a high and dressy cap perched on the top of it. This evening her gown was of soft twilled shot-green silk, a white net kerchief was crossed under its body, and she had on a white muslin apron.

"I don't mind," assented the lawyer, as easy in disposition as Miss Betty was; "it's of no use keeping it that I know of. Send for Ward and ask him, if you like, Betty."

Ward, a carpenter and cabinet maker, who had a shop in the town and sometimes bought second-hand things, was sent for by Miss Betty on the following morning; and he agreed, after some chaffering, to buy the old bureau. It was the bureau from which Philip's box of gold had disappeared—but I dare say you have understood that. In the midst of all this stir and clatter, just as Ward betook himself away after concluding the negotiation, and the maids were hard at work above stairs with mops and pails and scrubbing brushes, the first advance guard of the visitors unexpectedly walked in: Captain Cockermuth.

Miss Betty sat down in an access of consternation. She could do nothing but stare. He had not been expected for a week yet; there was nothing ready and nowhere to put him.

"I wish you'd take to behave like a rational being, Charles!" she exclaimed. "We are all in a mess; the rooms upside down, and the bed-side carpets hanging out at the windows."

Captain Cockermuth said he did not care for bed-side carpets,

he could sleep anywhere—on the brewhouse bench if she liked. He quite approved of selling the old bureau, when told it was going to be done.

Ward had appointed five o'clock that evening to fetch it away. They were about to sit down to dinner when he came, five o'clock being the hour for late dinners then in ordinary life. Ward had brought a man with him and they went upstairs.

Miss Betty, as carver, sat at the top of the dinner-table, her back to the windows, the lawyer in his place at the foot, Charles between them, facing the fire. Miss Betty was cutting off the first bone of a loin of veal when the bureau was heard coming down the staircase, with much bumping and noise.

Mr. Cockermuth stepped out of the dining-room to look on. The captain followed: being a sociable man with his fellow townspeople, he went to ask Ward how he did.

The bureau came down safely, and was lodged at the foot of the stairs; the man wiped his hot face, while Ward spoke with Captain Cockermuth. It seemed quite a commotion in the usual quiet dwelling. Susan, a jug of ale in her hand, which she had been to the cellar to draw, stood looking on from the passage; Mr. Dene and a younger clerk, coming out of the office just then to leave for the evening, turned to look on also.

"I suppose there's nothing in here, sir?" cried Ward, returning to business and the bureau.

"Nothing, I believe," replied Mr. Cockermuth.

"Nothing at all," called out Miss Betty through the open parlour door. "I emptied the drawers this morning."

Ward, a cautious man and honest, drew back the lid and put his hand in succession into the pigeon-holes; which had not been used since Philip's time. There were twelve of them; three above, and three below on each side, and a little drawer that locked in the middle. "Halloo!" cried Ward, when his hand was in the depth of one of them: "here's something."

And he drew forth the lost box. The little ebony box with all the gold in it.

Well now, that was a strange thing. Worcester thinks so, those people who are still living to remember it, to this day. How it was that the box had appeared to be lost and was searched for in vain over and over again, by poor Philip and others; and how it was that it was now recovered in this easy and natural manner, was never explained or accounted for. Ward's opinion was that the box must have been put in, side upwards, that it had in some way stuck to the back of the deep, narrow pigeon-hole, which just about held the box in width, that those who had searched took the box for the back of the hole when their fingers touched it, and that the bumping of the bureau now in coming downstairs had dislodged the box and brought it forward. As a maker of bureaus, Ward's opinion was listened to

with deference. Anyway, it was a sort of theory, serving passably well in the absence of any other. But who knew? All that was certain about it was the fact; the loss and the recovery after many years. It happened just as here described, as I have already said.

Sam Dene had never heard of the loss. Captain Cockermuth, perfectly beside himself with glee, explained it to him. Sam laughed as he touched with his forefinger the closely-packed golden guineas, lying there so snug and safe, offered his congratulations, and walked home to tea.

It chanced that on that especial Tuesday evening, matters were at sixes and sevens in the Parslets' house. Sally had misbehaved herself and was discharged in consequence; and the servant engaged in her place, who was to have entered that afternoon, had not made her appearance. When Sam entered, Maria came out of the parlour, a pretty blush upon her face. And to Sam the unexpected sight of her, it was not often he got a chance of it, and the blush and the sweet eyes came like a gleam of Eden, for he had grown to love her dearly. Not that he had owned it to himself yet.

Maria explained. Her school had broken up for the Easter holidays earlier than it ought, one of the girls showing symptoms of measles; and her mother had gone out to see what had become of the new servant, leaving a request that Mr. Dene would take his tea with them in the parlour that evening, as there was nobody to wait on him.

Nothing loth, you may be sure, Mr. Dene accepted the invitation, running up to wash his hands, and give a look at his hair, and running down in a trice. The tea-tray stood in readiness on the parlour table, Maria sitting behind it. Perhaps she had given a look at *her* hair, for it was quite more lovely, Sam thought, more soft and silken than any hair he had ever seen. The little copper kettle sang away on the hob by the fire.

"Will papa be long, do you know?" began Maria demurely, feeling shy and conscious at being thus thrown alone into Sam's company. "I had better not make the tea until he comes in."

"I don't know at all," answered Sam. "He went out on some business for Mr. Cockermuth at half-past four, and was not back when I left. Such a curious thing has just happened up there, Miss Parslet!"

"Indeed! What is it?"

Sam entered on the narrative. Maria, who knew all about the strange loss of the box, grew quite excited as she listened. "Found!" she exclaimed. "Found in the same bureau! And all the golden guineas in it!"

"Every one," said Sam: "as I take it. They were packed right up to the top!"

"Oh, what a happy thing!" repeated Maria, in a fervent tone that rather struck Sam, and she clasped her fingers into one another, as one sometimes does in pleasure or in pain.

"Why do you say that, Miss Parslet?"

"Because papa—but I do not think I ought to tell you," added Maria, breaking off abruptly.

"Oh yes, you may. I am quite safe, even if it's a secret. Please do."

"Well," cried the easily-persuaded girl, "papa has always had an uncomfortable feeling upon him ever since the loss. He feared that some people, knowing he was not well off, might think perhaps it was he who had stolen upstairs and taken it."

Sam laughed at that.

"He has never *said* so, but somehow we have seen it, my mother and I. It was altogether so mysterious a loss, you see, affording no clue as to *when* it occurred, that people were ready to suspect anything, however improbable. Oh, I am thankful it is found!"

The kettle went on singing, the minutes went on flitting, and still nobody came. Six o'clock struck out from the cathedral as Mr. Parslet entered. Had the two been asked the time, they might have said it was about a quarter-past five. Golden hours fly quickly; fly on angels' wings.

Now it chanced that while they were at tea, a creditor of Sam's came to the door, one Jonas Badger. Sam went to him: and the colloquy that ensued might be heard in the parlour. Mr. Badger said (in quite a fatherly way) that he really could not be put off any longer with promises; if his money was not repaid to him before Easter he should be obliged to take steps about it, should write to Mr. Jacobson, of Elm Farm, to begin with. Sam returned to the tea-table with a wry face.

Soon after that, Mrs. Parslet came in, the delinquent servant in her rear. Next, a friend of Sam's called, Austin Chance, whose father was a solicitor in good practice in the town. The two young men, who were very intimate and often together, went up to Sam's room above.

"I say, my good young friend," began Chance, in a tone that might be taken for jest or earnest, "don't you go and get into any entanglement in that quarter."

"What d'you mean now?" demanded Sam, turning the colour of the rising sun.

"I mean Maria Parslet," said Austin Chance, laughing. "She's a deuced nice girl; I know that; just the one a fellow might fall in love with unawares. But it wouldn't do, Dene."

"Why wouldn't it do?"

"Oh, come now, Sam, you know it wouldn't. Parslet is only a working clerk at Cockermuth's."

"I should like to know what has put the thought in your head?" contended Sam. "You had better put it out again. I've never told you I was falling in love with her; or told herself, either. Mrs. Parslet would be about me, I expect, if I did. She looks after her as one looks after gold."

"Well, I found you in their room, having tea with them, and——"

"It was quite an accident; an exceptional thing," interrupted Sam.

"Well," repeated Austin, "you need not put your back up, old fellow; a friendly warning does no harm. Talking of gold, Dene, I've done my best to get up the twenty pounds you wanted to borrow of me, and I can't do it. I'd let you have it with all my heart if I could; but I find I am harder up than I thought for."

Which was all true. Chance was as good-natured a young man as ever lived, but at this early stage of his life he made more debts than he could pay.

"Badger has just been here, whining and covertly threatening," said Sam. "I am to pay up in a week, or he'll make me pay—and tell my uncle, he says, to begin with."

"Hypocritical old skinflint!" ejaculated Chance, himself sometimes in the hands of Mr. Badger—a worthy gentleman who did a little benevolent usury in a small and quiet way, and took his delight in accommodating safe young men. A story was whispered that young M., desperately hard-up, borrowed two pounds from him one Saturday night, undertaking to repay it, with two pounds added on for interest, that day month; and when the day came and M. had not got the money, or was at all likely to get it, he carried off a lot of his mother's plate under his coat to the pawnbroker's.

"And there's more besides Badger's that is pressing," went on Dene. "I must get money from somewhere, or it will play the very deuce with me. I wonder whether Charley Hill could lend me any?"

"Don't much think so. You might ask him. Money seems scarce with Hill always. Has a good many ways for it, I fancy."

"Talking of money, Chance, a lot has been found at Cockermuth's to-day. A boxful of guineas that has been lost for years."

Austin Chance stared. "You don't mean that box of guineas that mysteriously disappeared in Philip's time?"

"Well, they say so. It is a small, round box of carved ebony, and it is stuffed to the brim with old guineas. Sixty of them, I hear."

"I can't believe it's true; that *that's* found."

"Not believe it's true, Chance! Why I saw it. Saw the box found, and touched the guineas with my fingers. It has been hidden in an old bureau all the time," added Sam, and he related the particulars of the discovery.

"What an extraordinary thing!" exclaimed young Chance: "the queerest start I ever heard of." And he fell to musing.

The "queer start," as Mr. Austin Chance was pleased to designate the resuscitation of the box, did not prove to be a lucky one. But the strange complications it entailed and the disastrous troubles that followed, must be told of next month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

AN OLD RHYME.

IN a very old edition of the diary kept by Dr. Burney during his travels, the following quaint verse, said to be by the English violinist, Davis Mell, is inscribed :

"Fair Italia plays the guitar, while the castanet pleases proud Spain;
 Lively France touches softly her lute; Erin's harp wails her bondage, her slain;
 The German his trumpet blows loud; England's violin steals out your soul;
 The fife for the Swiss, the drum for the Dutch—the fiddle out-values the whole."

To all appearance the violinist Peter Salomon, a born German, had chosen this ditty for his watchword in the year 1789; at which time, he being appointed Royal Musical Director in London, proceeded to organise in Hanover Square those concerts now so well-known under the name of "The Philharmonic." For these he industriously gathered together from all quarters the most excellent of available performers, vocal and instrumental.

The old rhyme hung in great letters over his work-table; the words "the German his trumpet blows loud," being underscored with red ink. Salomon's eyes went continually in this direction. The line was a grievous offence to him. In it his beloved musical Fatherland was mocked at, and depreciated; and the fact that to Switzerland and Holland only a fife and drum had been allotted proved in no way comforting. In the deepest depths of his heart he had sworn an oath never to rest until he had either discovered in Germany the most wonderful of all trumpeters or had gathered together such an assemblage of Teutonic musicians as would astonish the world.

His orchestra was now almost perfect, and he continually entertained the public with some novelty, and brought hither, with his wand, artists from many distant climes. He could have been happy at his vocation had he never met with this wretched verse. But of late vexation had ever been gnawing at his heart. His Germany which had produced already a Glück, a Handel, a Mozart—that it should be held up to the scorn of Englishmen as a country of trumpeters!

Having duly or unduly fretted over this matter, the Director at length, in the autumn of 1789, resolved to revisit his home; to see how things were with his own eyes; to hear with his own ears; to recruit for his greatest concert; or to find his super-excellent trumpeter, in envy and admiration of whose strains all England was to ring.

Salomon went direct to Vienna. He desired much to make the

acquaintance of Joseph Haydn, whose beautiful music was daily becoming better known and admired. The Director resolved to pay his first visit in the city to this composer. The task of finding him was not, however, so easy as he had expected. He had to seek long and to ask many questions before making sure of the identity of the very modest dwelling in which he was at length positively informed the great man dwelt.

Joseph Haydn, at this time, was Kapellmeister and musical director to Prince Esterhazy, who paid him for his services at the rate of 400 gulden a-year. His duties were manifold. He was conductor, composer, copyist and music-master. He taught personally every performer in his orchestra. From morning till evening he was rushing about on the business of his "dear master," as he always, with grateful simplicity, called the Prince. It was only late at night he could find an hour to himself, in which to jot down on paper a few of the many incomparable musical thoughts ever flowing through his gentle soul.

Well for Haydn that he was of a happy, peaceful and contented spirit. His serenity all came from within. In his home, even, there was much to irritate and disturb. His wife was of a restless and excitable temperament, more likely to need than to diffuse calmness. But her Joseph was a very fountain of inward bliss. Trouble passed over his head as clouds come and go in May. A melancholy glance, a deep sigh, then an effort, and all was forgiven and forgotten. He wrote down any injury that was done him on the sands of speedy oblivion; but a benefit received was engraved upon the pure metal of his faithful heart for ever. He had many tempting offers of preferment, but he could not be induced to leave the Prince. "I owe everything to my dear master," he would say. "All I do pleases him. I should be ungrateful if I left; I am a monarch within my little kingdom, and can make what experiments I like, and can watch the effect of any novelty I introduce. I am apart from the noisy world, and yet I am always busy. What more can I desire?"

Thus, as the years went by, he continued his studying, teaching, directing, copying and practising upon the many instruments at which he had made himself a proficient.

As he went from place to place where business called him, he always had a genial word for one or another, or could find time to caress a pretty child, to gather a wayside flower, or to bestow a trifle in alms; and was never seen without a smile upon his lips—the fragrant halo, as it were, of the new-born melody floating through his brain.

It was only in the autumn and winter months that Haydn lived in Vienna. During the summer he and the Prince resided at Eisenstadt, in Hungary. It was while travelling thither and back that most of Joseph's principal works were composed. Besides his symphonies and quartets, during these years of service under the Prince, he gave the world his nineteen operas, his fifteen masses, his first

oratorio, "Dido," his Seven words upon the Cross, and his 163 pieces for the viola di bardone, his master's favourite instrument. What amazing activity! Peter Salomon knew the whole story well. As he thought it over, now, his eagerness to see Haydn face to face grew in intensity.

He was doomed to be disappointed, however. The master was not at home. A servant showed the visitor through a narrow hall into a small sitting-room, and left him there, to listen and watch for Joseph's return. Salomon examined his surroundings with that lively interest we all feel in those things amongst which one lives to whom we cleave in love or admiration. The furniture was poor and shabby. A small spinet stood in one corner, and near it lay a goodly heap of music. Flowers grew in the window, and a bird-cage hung above them. The great musician never forgot to water the plants or to notice his canary. It was an especial favourite, and often pecked at his fingers as he sat at work.

Salomon waited for an hour. The pet songster chirped and twittered. The harvest sunshine streamed through the casement, transforming this plain, small room into a golden palace, and causing a splendid diamond ring upon the wealthy Director's finger to flash and sparkle. The visitor drew it off, and put it to hide for a while within his waistcoat pocket. He did not wish to look too fine here in this humble but honourable dwelling. Some sudden feeling of shame at his own prosperity took possession of him. But no Haydn appeared, and the watcher at length grew weary of lingering, and began to remember that in all probability visitors were even now inquiring for him at his hotel.

He left the house, and slowly began to retrace his steps, meditating again, as he went, upon that ever-haunting and irritating rhyme. It was no consolation to him that Dr. Burney winds up his remarks upon Germany by confessing that in spite of its cold, unattractive landscape, its badly-paved streets, and its rough custom-house officers, it is yet quite possible to live contentedly and merrily in the Rhine-land.

As he went along, and for the hundredth time, muttered indignant to himself those obnoxious words, "The German his trumpet blows loud," the sound of that very instrument suddenly smote upon his ear. A wonderful peal came wafting towards him, floating, or as it were, forced forth from the uncongenial confinement of some narrow room close at hand.

Salomon soon found the house from which the music came, and identified the performers. Two men stood together. One listened in a respectful and admiring attitude. The other, who was slender and spiritual-looking, blew; and as he did so Peter Salomon's heart throbbed and swelled. It seemed to him that he stood in a battlefield; banners floated; horses impatiently pawed the ground; hosts of courageous men rushed forward, and a mighty shout, "Forward

for our King and Fatherland ! The Lord is on our side ! " rent the air.

The window at which the listener stood was open. The Director stepped inside with eager haste, and put forth his hand upon the slight man's shoulder. "Found ! Found !" he exclaimed. "You must come back to England with me. There cannot be a second trumpeter in the world like you."

The musician put his instrument down, and turned a wondering glance upon the impetuous speaker.

The latter began again. "Yes, yes," he proceeded in a reassuring tone; "I am in earnest. I do not jest. I am the Royal Musical Director in London. I can make your fortune for you. I have been searching for a splendid solo trumpeter and have found you in the nick of time. I will certainly take you back to England with me."

The other smiled. He was as calm as the speaker was excited. "It is impossible," he said softly. "I have no time. I have, as you see, to teach my pupils myself, for my name is Haydn—Joseph Haydn."

One year later, however, Prince Esterhazy died, and Salomon then succeeded in inducing this great man to come over to London for one of the Hanover Square concert evenings. On this occasion Haydn conducted the performance of one of his own symphonies, to the delight of an applauding audience. He was not the only German musician present who then did honour to his country. A singer named Gertrude Mara was universally allowed to be the *Prima Donna* of the day, and to have distinguished herself far above all the Italian and French singers then in England.

During the supper party which wound up the night, the Director read out Dr. Burney's old rhyme, and told, amid much laughter and applause, the story of his hunt after a trumpeter. Haydn was chuckling with the rest, when his fair countrywoman, the Queen of Song, quickly rose from her seat, hastened to him, and kissed him on the lips, putting a hand, the while, on each side of his head, and thereby dispersing a cloud of powder. All the other ladies present followed her example; and Joseph afterwards declared this was the prettiest and pleasantest ovation he had ever received.

It was during his stay in England that Haydn composed his best oratorio.

NARISSA ROSAVO.

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD,
AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," ETC.

THE Squadron of the First Reserve, under command of Admiral H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, was to sail for her six weeks' cruise on the 15th June, 1882.

Once a year the First Reserve Squadron takes a cruise for the drill and exercise of those men who form the Reserve strength of our Navy in times of emergency; and in days of peace, as coastguardsmen, protect the shores of our island from surprise of the enemy or fear of smuggling.

About half the number are drafted each year into the eight vessels of war comprising the Squadron of the First Reserve. Thus, every coastguardsman, up to a certain age, has his turn once in two years. About four thousand men, in addition to the ships' company, join the Squadron for each cruise.

A more delightful cruise for anyone who has the somewhat exceptional privilege of sailing with the Squadron as a guest, cannot be imagined. The mere fact of the group of eight men-of-war constantly maintaining their position and their line, is sufficient to give unusual interest to the voyage. It banishes all idea of monotony; throws life into your surroundings; adds beauty and dignity to the waters the vessels ride so steadily and so proudly. Morning after morning, coming up on deck, still you find each vessel in her appointed place. You grow familiar with every outline, note every point of beauty: where one vessel excels another or falls short, as the case may be. In a rough sea, especially, you discover that two at least out of the eight have the gift or grace of rolling: and if there is no "fine frenzy" about them, can as much be said of the small and select few in the Squadron who have not yet gained full possession of their sea legs?

In the day time, at the mast-head of every vessel a man is ever on the watch. From his vantage-ground he can sweep the seas and give timely warning of every danger that might be looming in the distance. Forewarned is forearmed. If there is any chance of collision, it quickly passes away. Should a Van Tromp come down upon us with an Armada and an inverted besom—we are ready for him, and he and his vessels turn tail and run home. At night there are five "look-out" men stationed in different parts of the ship, whose gruff voices are heard at the strike of every bell, notifying that they are on the alert, and whose duty it is to report any light or vessels round the horizon. Thus we enjoy a perpetual and pleasant feeling of perfect safety.

The daily drill and exercise, the tactics and manœuvres, form other

points of interest in the cruise. And here, while every vessel contributes her share of the spectacle (in manœuvres for instance, and in sail drill) each vessel is independent of the others. There is nearly always something going on ; something to be done or to be seen. And the intervals of inaction are an interregnum of peace and quietness, inexpressibly delicious. There is an unusual charm in the moments of repose on board a man-of-war. The whole sweep of an immense deck is stretched before you. Every rope, every pin, the most trifling object or the most important, is in its place. This huge battlement might be the toy of a race a thousand times larger than man. Silence reigns. The men are forward, quite a long way off, it seems. Most of them are out of sight, lying down upon the deck,



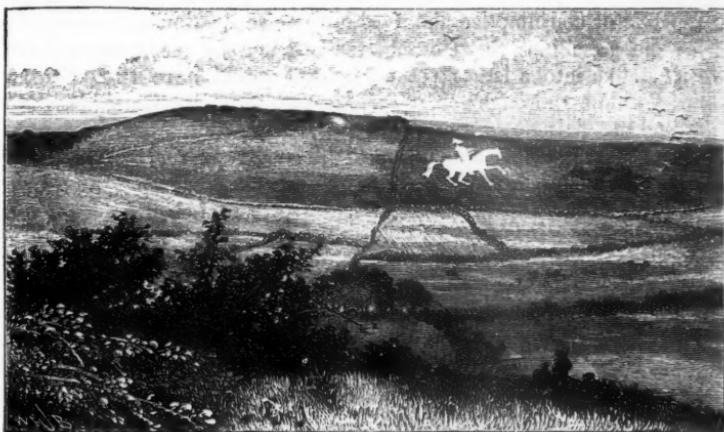
WEYMOUTH.

or sheltering beneath the forecastle, or screened behind tarpaulins or hatchway covers. The skies happen to be blue and serene ; the rolling ocean is blue also, and calm as a lake. We ride majestically on her bosom ; are soothed as a child sleeping on its mother's breast ; possess the same unconscious sense of security and innocence of mind.

The officers cluster in the stern of the ship ; lean against a gun or over the sides, gazing dreamily into space ; contemplate the majesty of the surrounding scene, and administer little reflections to each other that are very edifying, bringing up the tone of one's mind to a higher level than is easily attainable on shore. When we come to think of it, it is no wonder that our naval men are full of lofty aspirations and impossible ideals, putting ordinary landsmen to the blush.

Or perhaps they may be in the ward-room. One (Van Stoker) far gone in love—for naval men are mortal, after all—will be inditing sonnets to a lady's eyebrows, destined for the post at the next port

we touch at. Another (Captain Pyramid) will be reading up a page of Sanskrit. A third (the amiable M.B., our junior surgeon) is studying Theology for a Debating Society. A fourth (Pat Darcy: the only leaven of Irish blood in the ward-room wherewith to infuse a slight tone of dash and romance and wildness into the more sober Saxon temperament) is great in art treasures, and pores over the most wonderful collection of photographs and black paper silhouettes in the United Kingdom. He spends half his time in gazing dreamily at their beauties and re-arranging their order; occasionally holding one up to our united and enthusiastic admiration. Two frivolous minds at the other end of the table are somewhat distracting the attention of our more sober intellects by rattling the dice at a game



THE WHITE HORSE.

of backgammon. Perhaps it is as well that there *are* one or two frivolous beings on board. It keeps up the balance of things, the contrast of light and shade; prevents our becoming altogether a group of students too much devoted to the midnight oil and the study of philosophy and metaphysics, the interesting topic of molecules.

Finally, this cruise is especially delightful because of the companionship. There is no pleasanter, more gentlemanly, more genial set of men on the face of the globe than our naval officers. Devoid of all affectation and conceit, there is a freedom and frankness about them, a straightforward genuineness, an apparent forgetfulness of self, which makes them the best of friends, the pleasantest of guests, the most hospitable of hosts. Entering the Service at an age scarcely beyond childhood (a point that certainly needs re-consideration) they are launched upon a long course of severe discipline—and, where the First Lieutenant happens to be a martinet, of suffering. All nonsense is knocked out of them, and arriving at man's estate, they reap the benefit of the school that has fitted them for their profession.

Our military men have not the same advantages—or disadvantages—and cannot expect similar results. They have to wait for time and the slower discipline of life. But they, too, become the pleasantest of friends and companions when the first grey hairs begin to show themselves, and—say thirty-five—has struck upon the gong of time.

So, receiving and accepting an invitation to join the First Reserve on her cruise, I felt that pleasure and profit were in store when the actual day arrived, and the train from London steamed into the old, perhaps quaint, but certainly not very lively town of Weymouth.

Crossing the Parade in front of the sea, I came full tilt upon my old friend Charlie Broadley. For a moment I thought I saw a ghost—only that the apparition was scarcely shadowy enough, and was by no means transparent. Broadley is very real; there is nothing of the dyspeptic or consumptive about him to raise sentimental emotions. Had he gone into the Church, for instance, he could never have degenerated into a ladies' pet curate, but would have turned out a hard-working, thorough-going, earnest and muscular Christian. No parting the hair down the middle, or perfumed handkerchiefs; no incense or vestments; and no *Æsthetic* rooms for receiving the fair sex to five o'clock tea as a prelude to Vespers.

I thought it a ghost because he had written: “I shall *not* meet you at Weymouth. Come-on to Portland, and at 5.30 you will find one of our boats waiting for you at the pier-head. Bring a supply of serious literature with you. We are nearly all of a hard-working, studious turn on board, given to discuss science and all the ologies, politics, the Land League and the Salvation Army; but we relax our minds at night with a little whist.”

For Broadley to say a thing is to do it, and therefore I doubted for a moment what stood before me. But his *unshadowy* form and his hearty laugh—Broadley's laugh runs on for ever, like a brook, and is just as refreshing—assured me that no ghost was here. He, on his part, likewise thought he saw a spirit—and, in point of shadow and substance, with more excuse for his error. For, marvellous to relate, the train had come in before its time, and Broadley, then on his way to the station, looked to wait for it. As it was, we were just in time for the next train onward; so instead of turning in to the Club, and wasting our precious moments in the frivolous politics of the day, we said good-bye to Weymouth and went round to Portland.

A short journey, but one that must often have been taken with a heavy heart: the end of many a man's liberty, his last look, as it were, upon the world. There was the prison-crowned hill, overlooking the sea and the breakwater. The grey walls, like battlements and fortifications, stood out in contrast with the green slopes, steep, rugged, barren. Flocks of sheep without the walls, cropping the short grass, wandered at will—whilst the unhappy human goats within, laboured and sighed, and now and then rebelled, and, as far as liberty went, found no place for repentance. The hill reared

its head, a standing monument to the sad side of life. If you wander near the walls, the silence of death ever seems to reign there. Within is a busy hive, but no hum of bees. To-day the hill looked bright and cheerful in the afternoon sunshine, bringing more vividly before the imagination the contrast of the little unseen world it held. Now and then a prisoner tries to escape ; now and then one *has* escaped, though rarely ; and when the alarm is given, the peace of the island is disturbed by the gun that booms forth its warning. What a death knell it must sound to the poor hunted wretch, who, perhaps has plunged into the sea, and thrown himself on the tender mercies of the waves, as his last chance for life and liberty.

Portland is altogether an interesting little place. The town, on the other side the hill, slopes down to the sea, and the coast sweeps round in a long, far-reaching curve. The quarries are numerous, and the stone they send forth to the world has been destined alike for palace and for prison. Across the water, jutting out on a point of land, are the grey, crumbling ruins of Sandsfoot Castle ; and yet further off is a White Horse Valley, the huge representation of the animal and its rider, on the slope of the hill, just discernible from the island.

Out on the broad waters, the Squadron was at anchor : the Flagship—the Hercules—nearest in shore. Eight men-of-war waiting the hour for departure. Within the calm shelter of the breakwater, the Fleet looked noble and stately. The more impressive, perhaps, that already in the Far East one heard the rumble of distant thunder. The bugle-call to action was striking its first clear note, stirring up the hearts and homes of England.

At the end of the short pier, the steam pinnace was waiting, and in a few minutes we stood on board the splendid deck of the *Defence*. And here it may be well to state for the enlightenment of the uninitiated reader, that a man-of-war has three decks : the upper, the main, and the lower. To the unlearned in these matters, there is often a confusion of ideas between the upper deck and the main deck : so that they are, as it were, constantly changing places, and performing a sort of miracle that, on board, would often cause an agreeable diversion.

The upper deck is open to the sky, the full fresh air ; you breathe freely. The main deck will supply you with sufficient air for one lung at a time, so that the lungs breathe alternately ; one in and one out, like the action of a harmonium : you are in comparative luxury. The lower deck—which in the *Defence*, owing to her watertight compartments, is so cut up into sections, or what some old sea-dog originally designated “flats”—refuses to supply any air at all, and you become at once amphibious. Whenever the ward-room reaches a temperature of 212° , or boiling water point, a windsail is immediately put down, communicating with the upper deck. It is a huge, very huge funnel made of canvas ; the upper portion spread out like wings, and attached to the rigging. At night it looks like a great bird of

prey, seeking someone to devour. These wings catch all the air they can, and send it down this impromptu shaft. If anyone, less amphibious than another, is very much overcome by the 212° , he lies flat on the floor underneath the shaft, and receives the full benefit of the air bath. Should this fail to revive him, he is then carried on deck—the upper deck—and placed in an easy chair; the doctor pays constant attention to his pulse, cooling draughts are administered, and restoration gradually takes place.

But some ward-rooms are better than others; and the more newly-constructed vessels are built with some regard to the unnecessary



SANDSFOOT CASTLE.

sacrifice of human life. The *Defence*, was about the oldest vessel in the First Reserve. She had the finest upper deck, but, in revenge, perhaps the worst ward-room. And when the scuttles of the cabins leading from the ward-room had to be closed on account of danger from without, the atmosphere would sometimes bring on congestion of brain and body: cases of suspended animation: interesting as types to the doctor, perhaps, but distressing to the patient. Almost every night, someone in an adventurous state of mind, would turn in with an open scuttle, and wake presently to find that a sea had washed in, and that he was lying in a salt water bath. Not a pleasant surprise.

Perhaps someone asks for an explanation of the word Ward-room. A man-of-war has its quarters and departments just like any other

great institution. There are, to begin with, the Captain's quarters, in the stern of the vessel, and communicating with the main deck. Here, night and day stands a sentry, keeping guard, as it were, over the monarch of the ship. For every captain on board a man-of-war is a King. The captain's quarters are comparatively large and airy, and consist of several—rooms, as a landsman would call them. On the other hand, being over the screw, they come in for all the plunging and vibration of that most useful and ingenious, but most unpleasant invention. Again, being immediately under the upper deck—which, as it were, forms the ceiling of the Captain's quarters,



BOW AND ARROW CASTLE.

every sound above is heard, ten times magnified. So that occasionally you may fancy yourself in a Dante's Inferno, tormented both above and below, no rest anywhere.

All sounds had a way of amplifying themselves in the Captain's cabin. One night Wakeham, the gunnery lieutenant, went off in the steam pinnace to discharge a torpedo. He declared that he was two miles away, and yet the horrible thing shook everything upon the Captain's table and sideboard, and sent us all three jumping out of our chairs like rockets. No warning had been given to us, and you might have fancied that the torpedo had exploded within ten yards of the stern.

When my old friend Broadley left the *Defence* on his promotion (the news reached him at the Alhambra, of all lovely places in the

world for good tidings) and at the invitation of Captain Trelawny Jago I became his guest and took up my quarters with him, I was awakened regularly every morning about 4.30 by the scrubbing of decks. The men would come to the locker overhead, take out their infernal machines—*i.e.*, brushes, squeegees and swabs—ram the handles into the brushes with a vengeance that made one think the very deck itself would come through, and commence operations. The agonies that ensued banished all possibility of sleep. Often I would wake and find myself unconsciously quoting Hood's lines, merely changing the gender for the sake of applicability :

"But his sleep was restless and broken still,
For, turning often and oft
From side to side, he mutter'd and moan'd,
And tossed his arms aloft."

Until at seven o'clock the Captain's steward or his valet, like a ministering angel (in all but appearance) would arrive with biscuits and a cup of coffee to restore exhausted nature, and depart with blessings in their stead.

It was only towards the very last that, in the course of conversation, I happened in a weak moment to mention the torments I had gone through with the heroism of a martyr, in consequence of this early scrubbing.

"And you mean to say," said Captain Jago, "that you never rang the bell for the sentry, and had it stopped and the men sent to Jericho—rather than be disturbed?"

I should as soon have thought of taking command of the Fleet. There is a punctuality, a severity, an observance, a regularity on board a man-of-war that inspires awe in a civilian in the carrying out of the smallest rule and detail, and makes him tremble in his shoes when an unfortunate delinquent is brought up for punishment. For creating a true manliness of bearing, a firmness and decision of character, there can be no better school than the Navy. Had I issued a very mild protest for a little less noise overhead, I should almost have expected to be tried by court-martial.

"If I had only known this beforehand," said Captain Jago, in the kindness of his heart and the fulness of his hospitality, "I would have had the scrubbing put off to a later hour." It was almost the last day of our more than pleasant cruise—and I was glad I had not spoken sooner.

The Captain's quarters, then, are on the main deck. For the ward-room of the *Defense* we descended a stage, to the lower deck. The ward-room is the mess-room of the officers, including not only the lieutenants and the officers of the marines (we know how the marines distinguished themselves in the late war, proved themselves the very backbone of the army, and were always in the hottest of the fight, "Per mare per terram"—they were equally brave on shore or afloat) but also the Chaplain, the Doctors, the Paymaster, and, of late, the Chief Engineer.

Here we messed. Here we would sit, sometimes in a temperature of 212° . Here we would discuss science, and read aloud learned treatises for the benefit of each other. Here Pyramid would study Sanskrit, and the ever-amiable M.B. would discourse learnedly on the origin of species ; and Van Stoker would sit and sigh and moon by the hour together, and indite sonnets to his lady-love : whole reams of poetry—as I was afterwards to find to my cost. Here the rattle of dice in frivolous hands at frivolous backgammon would be heard from early morn to dewy eve, and here at night we would relax the severe discipline of study with a serious rubber.

Punctually at eleven, enter Diogenes with his lantern—a marine whose duty it was to announce the hour—as fatal to us as midnight to Cinderella. A sort of animated Curfew. A tall, grave figure enveloped in a long cloak, and looking like a walking ghost. A lantern in one hand hanging by his side, the other giving a military salute, as if his life depended on it, and the muffled voice announcing the end of another day. So exact were we ; so particular, conscientious and punctilious were the officers, that even if the announcement came in the very middle of a rubber, down would go cards, up we would rise, score our points, out like a flash went the lights, and in solemn procession each would depart to his cabin. If the M.B. gave a “small and early” in his own den, the same rigid punctuality was observed.

What a beautiful lesson this naval observance of rules and regulations sets us landsmen ! How we may hide our diminished heads ! We who, not being bound by any particular form or set of codes ; being, as it were, our own masters, accountable only to ourselves, are therefore almost more bound by honour to walk in the strict path of duty. And how thoughtful of the Lords of the Admiralty to have instituted this rule, who know how essential it is to health and beauty that man should retire to rest at reasonable hours.

The M.B. was the only one on board who ever gave a “small and early,” just alluded to. His servant would take round the invitations, worded as follows. We will quote the first one that comes to hand as an example. It related to the *last* “small and early” of the cruise, and was addressed to Pyramid :

“The M.B. requests the honour of Captain Pyramid’s company, at a small and early to-night, Thursday, the 20th July, for purposes of Discussion and Improvement. Subject :—The evil effects of smoking as illustrated by the immoderate use of tobacco on board the other vessels of the Royal Reserve Squadron, against the extreme moderation of the officers of the *Defence*. N.B.—Fans and smelling bottles not provided. 9 to 11.30. Naval time.”

But there is not space in this paper to go into the full particulars of these highly interesting and instructive little réunions. That may come by-and-bye.

And now to go back to Portland—not deprived of our liberty, beloved reader, but on the contrary prepared for flight. Standing, indeed, on the long, splendid deck of the *Defence*, I felt that for

some weeks to come I had said good-bye to England, and, virtually, to shore-life. The anticipation of the approaching cruise, of broad seas, and glorious air, and blue skies, and pleasant companionship, was keenest enjoyment. Pleasures are greater, it is said, in anticipation than in realisation. This instance was certainly an exception to the rule. But all men look at things from their own point of view. Life to one is death to another. One revels in the east wind, another would simply like to take to his bed when that kindly-cruel, cruelly-kind scourge is abroad on his rambles. No doubt many in the Fleet would be glad enough when at the appointed day and hour we once more dropped anchor within the Portland breakwater. The



CONVICTS AT WORK.

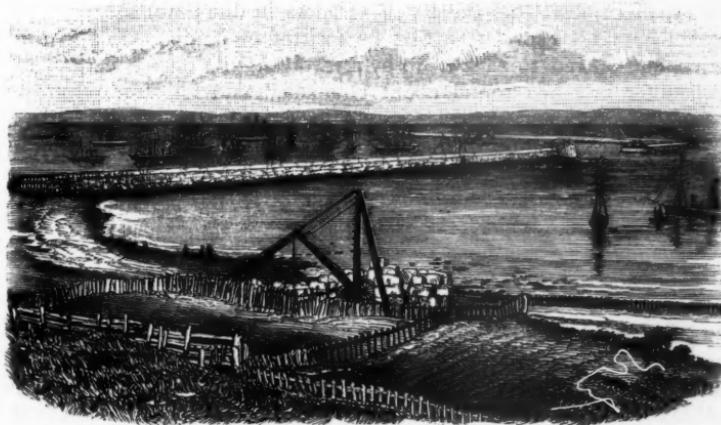
gobbies* for instance, to a man, one might be pretty well assured, were counting the hours when the ever-rolling stream of Time should restore them to the snug shelter of those little white homes that, at intervals encircle our island like a safety-belt. They looked upon the cruise not as matter of pleasure, but rather as a sentence of Six Weeks' Imprisonment with Hard Labour.

For the Reserve Squadron was not going into the excitement of action. We were not to proceed further than Gibraltar; not to see more of the blue waters of the Mediterranean than washed the base of the great rock; unless, mounting to the summit of that rock, we took a long, magnificent view of the tideless sea; where, on one side, across the Straits, stretched the faint outline of the shores of Morocco, and in fancy one saw uprising the mosque towers and minarets, the flat roofs and white walls of the ancient of Tangiers, the habits and customs of a thousand years ago still prevalent there to-day; where at night you stumble over the Moors lying in the streets, curled up in their sacks, like dogs, sleeping as comfortably as the luxury-loving European on

* Coastguardsmen.

his bed of down. "But in point of fact," I said recently to a friend, with the gravity of a sexton, "it is easy enough to avoid them, for at Tangiers it is full moon all the year round." "Indeed," cried he, in faith and amazement, "how do they manage that? And why can't we have it so in England?" And then doubt began to dawn upon him.

With the exception of Mr. Edward Jago, the brother of Captain Trelawny Jago, I was the only civilian, the only guest on board the *Defence*. Thus he and I were, in this respect, fellow sympathisers; could keep each other in countenance; make mutual notes and comparisons of all we should do, all we should reform, the weak points we should strengthen, the unnecessary discipline we should relax,



PORTLAND BREAKWATER.

the rapidity with which we should promote, the thousand-and-one comforts and luxuries we should organise for the happiness of the members of the British Navy—if only we were at the head of the Department. Perhaps, too, it was this "fellow feeling" that in all our subsequent days and occasional excursions, caused Mr. Jago to add so much to my pleasure, and to the liveliness of the whole cruise.

The following was to be our programme; and for all we then knew to the contrary, we should steadily keep to it.

Sailing from Portland, we should gradually lose sight of the coast of England, and presently entering the Bay of Biscay, make for Arosa Bay. Here we were to remain several days, and then proceed to Gibraltar. After a stay of eight or nine days at Gibraltar we were to return homewards and put into Cadiz. This would give some of us an opportunity of visiting Seville, famous for its orange groves and its beautiful women. From Cadiz we were to go on to Vigo; and thence steam leisurely back to Portland, reaching the latter on the 24th July; the whole cruise occupying rather more than five weeks.

The programme was a sufficiently interesting one. Moreover, it would allow those whose inclinations prompted them, or whose duties enabled them to obtain leave, to take excursions into the country, and so vary the monotony, the daily round and common task of board-ship life, by exploring the wonders and vast resources of Spain; and even vary the excitement of travel by an encounter with brigands, or the rescue of some fair Señorita from the cruel clutch and close confinement of convent walls. For even the greatest book-worms and most serious of men have been moved to deeds of heroism by the sight of youth and beauty in distress.

The encounter with brigands might be looked upon as a certainty. Indeed, later on, when starting on an excursion to the Alhambra (we shall come to that wonder of wonders in due time) so solicitous was Pyramid for my safety, that he insisted on lending me a sword-stick, and offered to back it up by a revolver. "You are certain to encounter brigands round about Granada," said he, "or prowling about the walls and groves of the Alhambra. If they don't attack you (though they are pretty sure to do that, and I advise everyone to make his will before starting), you may reckon that a few loose stones will come crashing down upon your head, and produce concussion of the brain."

This opinion was echoed by several others, who all spoke from a positive knowledge of facts. Had they themselves been to the Alhambra? Well, no; but they knew those who had—and had never returned to tell the tale. Then who *had* told the tale? Tradition—and a post-mortem.—This was startling and restraining, until it suddenly occurred to us that not one of these prophets of evil intended visiting the Alhambra. Intentions were good, but duty happened to interpose at the right—or wrong—moment. Remembering this, anyone with the slightest knowledge of human nature could put two and two together and draw his own conclusions. However, whilst the revolver was declined, the sword-stick was gratefully accepted. Whether or not it was used as a weapon of defence will appear in the sequel.

We were to sail on Thursday, the 15th June: but on that day the sun rose and set, and we made no sign. Certainly it was glorious weather, but that fickle element for once seemed settled, and one glorious day, after all, is very much like another. The sun rose on Friday, the 16th, in full splendour. The Duke was on board the Flagship, and also the Duke of Connaught, who, for the sake of the sea voyage, would accompany the Reserve Squadron as far as Gibraltar, and thence return overland to England.

At 9.30, on Friday, the 16th June, we started. We were to have put into Falmouth, but being a day late, we made straight for sea instead. This was disappointing; especially so to me. For I had hoped to get a glimpse of its good old Rector, who, in the days gone by, had been my beloved pastor and master: a man, who, for intellect and lore, and marvellous powers of conversation, stood almost un-

rivalled. I knew well how he would be watching the bay from his pleasant windows for our appearance, and would watch in vain.

Not many places in England equal Falmouth in the beauty of approach. Turner seems to have been one of the few to recognise this truth. The hills, repeating themselves over and over again in wave-like undulations ; the crescent sweep of the bay, its green, transparent waters meeting the white sand of the shore in a long-drawn, ever moving line ; the mouth of the harbour guarded so grandly by the walls of old Pendennis ; the distant view of the Fal beyond, its banks one rich unbroken carpet of waving trees : all these points contribute to form an exquisite and unrivalled picture. We hear little of it, whilst much is said of the approach to Plymouth, Dartmouth, and many other spots on our fair west coast. These indeed have their beauty, and may be content ; but the approach to Falmouth on a sunny day, is before them all. It possesses a grand, noble and open outline and effect altogether its own.

The *Lively*, the Duke's yacht, accompanied us on first starting, with the Duchess of Edinburgh on board, who could be distinguished sitting upon the bridge and watching the movements of the Fleet.

These movements were worth watching. The vessels in themselves were a grand sight. Nothing could be more stately than their manner of getting slowly under weigh, as one after another passed beyond the breakwater into the open Channel, and gradually took up its appointed station. Everything was in our favour. The freshness of the early morning was exhilarating. The sun, already far up in the sky, poured his rays upon the water, that danced and sparkled and flashed a thousand gleams around, as if to bid us a lively farewell and speed us on our voyage.

Then, in a double line of four vessels, two abreast, we proceeded to face these kindly elements.

This was our order :

The HERCULES.
H.R.H. The DUKE OF EDINBURGH in
Command of the Squadron.
(Captain HENEAGE.)

The WARRIOR.
(Captain TOWNSEND.)

The DEFENCE.
(Captain JAGO.)

The REPULSE.
(Captain SULIVAN.)

The LORD WARDEN.
(Captain CATOR.)

The HECTOR.
(Captain CARTER.)

The PENELOPE.
(Captain D'ARCY-IRVINE.)

The VALIANT.
(Captain POLAND.)

As soon as we were in position, the signal came from the Flagship to perform evolutions or tactics. A prettier and more graceful sight could not well be imagined. As the eight vessels gradually changed positions (a sort of *chassé croisé*) each vessel was supposed to do its work with mathematical precision. Starting from the position of the order of sailing—two lines of four, two abreast—perhaps they gradually resolved themselves into two lines of two, four abreast. Next form

into lines diagonal ; next separate, then close in : in fact, endeavour to square the circle, and so fulfil the plan signalled at the commencement from the Flagship. This lasted for some time, and when all was over, we fell back into our original positions.

From the *Lively* the effect must have been still more interesting than from any of the vessels, as the evolutions would be more distinctly marked, the graceful movements more apparent. The morning wore on, and after accompanying us for some hours, the yacht signalled for permission to part company. This being immediately granted, the following message was semaphored to the Flagship :

“The Duchess wishes the Reserve Squadron a pleasant cruise.”

And from the Flagship came the answer from the Duke :

“Many thanks. Good-bye.”

Upon which the *Lively* steamed away at full speed for Plymouth, where a train would be in waiting for the Duchess. The *Lively* would then proceed to Falmouth for all letters addressed to the Fleet ; which would not, in consequence of our changed movements, reach the hands of their several owners until the *Lively* joined us at Arosa Bay. Van Stoker, being in love, was especially distraught, went about like a shadow, and lost his colour.

With the departure of the *Lively* we felt that our last link with England had fallen away, the annual cruise of the First Reserve Squadron for 1882 had fairly commenced. A grander day had never dawned. Everything seemed to promise well for our pleasure and success. All that day we steamed down Channel, at a leisurely and stately speed. The English coast was in sight ; one well-known spot after another opened up and was left behind. The red cliffs of Devonshire looked warm and glowing in the sunshine. The rocky coast never seemed more picturesque and inviting. With the perversity of human nature, we loved them more than ever now that we were about to lose them for a time. But every absence is a farewell, and every farewell is the conclusion of a chapter in the Book of our transitory Life ; a reminder of the Finis that closes the Volume. So in every farewell there lurks an undertone in a full minor key which leaves us sad and solitary, and, to some extent, takes from the mind its just estimate of things that are passing.

But I don't know that to-day anyone was in a specially melancholy mood. There was too much brightness and sunshine over all. The anticipation of what was to come blotted out the regret for what we were now rapidly losing. Plymouth and Dartmouth were left behind. Out there, on the blue waters, stood the old and the new Eddystone lighthouses, looking like sire and son ; for the new beacon has been made larger and stronger than its predecessor. Our last impression of England was a combination of red sandstone cliffs and blue skies, and calm waters with long, stately rolls, that swept onwards and broke at last upon the shore.

NUMBER TWENTY-FIVE.

“LOSTHAVEN.—The Imperial Hotel. Unequalled as a winter resort. Tariff moderate.”—I dropped the paper and meditated on the advertisement. Across my fancy there came a sudden whiff of the salt sea-breeze, a vision of the wide grey tossing expanse of waters, a sound in my ears of the soft crashing pebbles on the wet brown beach. I had been smothered, poisoned by weeks of London fog. My eyes were tingling, my lungs choked, my ideas muddled. The more I tried to paint the stronger grew the conviction that, unless I let my pictures resolutely alone, I should have nothing fit to send in to the Spring exhibitions. I felt bothered, miserable, grimy to the bone.

“I'll try a week of Losthaven,” I suddenly decided. “Second-class tariff, railway fare included, won't ruin me. I'll make studies of wintry seas and skies if I can find nothing else. I'll start to-day!” In ten minutes I had reduced the room to chaos, rummaging out sketch-blocks, brushes, waterproof garments, and a spare suit. In half an hour I had packed and was slowly and painfully wending my way station-wards; cabby walking invisibly at the horse's head.

We crept out of London by degrees with much whistling and signalling. Black fog enveloped us till we crossed the river, then rows of buildings loomed more and more distinct of outline and paler of tint as they became more scattered, till the brown fields and bare hedges had the land to themselves. Then came the sun, red and wintry, hailed as the face of a friend long missed and mourned. A soft blue haze hung about the leafless coppices. A robin was singing like mad on a bush of green laurel in a station-master's garden. I didn't wonder at him. I could have shouted too. It was all so fresh, so life-giving, so *clean*. Colour, light, pure air, and—as evening drew on and dusk was falling—the Sea!

I could see it, grey and tossing in the distance, as I stood on the platform. It boomed in my ears as I, sole passenger in the new Hotel omnibus, was rattled down a bran new road and discharged under the imposing new portico of “The Imperial.”

I had expected to be “skied” in virtue of my second-class ticket, and was agreeably surprised at my accommodation. It was a little out-lying nook at the end of a corridor, into which opened some of the best suites of private rooms.

I found myself the solitary occupant of the coffee-room on descending to dinner, though one table was elaborately laid for a large party, and another, close to mine, for two people. Three or four gentlemen dropped in after me, and I presently became aware by a subdued sound of voices and the frou-frou of skirts, that the occu-

pants of the table behind me were taking their places. I could see one of them distinctly in a long mirror in front of me. A lady who insisted on being young and beautiful, and *was* undeniably well-dressed. She wore a queer mixture of coral pink cashmere and grey brocade, with clasps and ornaments of oxydised silver and coral. Nothing else about her worth looking at, I decided. "A blonde—paper-white instead of milk-white—green shadows instead of warm ones—eyelashes too light—waist too tight—elbows too sharp—nearer thirty than twenty—the gown suggests—"Trousseau." What is *he* like, I wonder?

I could only catch at intervals a glimpse of a long white nose above a heavy black moustache, turned deferentially to the little woman whenever she spoke—and she spoke a good deal, with much vivacious raising of the eyebrows and arch glancing of her china blue eyes. I could also see his right hand now and then as he lifted or put down a glass, and I didn't like it. I believe in the expression of a man's hand, though it is given to few to read it accurately. When the door opened to admit a party of ladies and gentlemen, Madame's animation increased. She shook out her draperies, unfurled her big pink feather fan and posed effectively. Her companion didn't seem to sympathize. I heard his chair give an impatient scroop; he disposed of his last glass of wine hastily, picked up her bouquet of azaleas, and made way for her to pass out; which she did lingeringly, watched with much interest by the party at the large table. My bride and groom appeared in the visitors' book as "The Hon. Claude and Mrs. Loseby."

"Loseby? Ah, a son of Lord Rotherwode's—a bad lot I fancy," was my mental comment, as wearily yawning, I ascended to my room, candlestick in hand. I passed the object of my reflections in converse with one of the chambermaids on the landing—an unattractive female with a grim white face and heavy black fringe—and, further on, as I passed the door of one of the private sitting-rooms, heard what I determined to be Mrs. Claude Loseby's voice singing a fashionable ballad with intense expression, to a slovenly accompaniment.

Up early next morning and out to a fresh, newly-washed, spray-besprinkled world. There had been a storm in the night, and the brown shingle was flecked with quivering patches of foam and dark wreaths of tangle. The hotel stood at the commencement of a sea-wall and parade, extending at that time some two hundred yards westwards. The sea had scattered pebbles and sand over the asphalté, and tossed about the huge blocks of stone at the unfinished end, as if they had been brickbats. I hurried back for breakfast and my sketching things, and returned just as the sun, breaking from a bank of softly piled grey clouds, set the whole glorious field of the sea sparkling and glancing right away over to France.

I had worked for an hour or so, before the tall hulking figure

of Mr. Claude Loseby passed between me and the sunshine. He walked to the edge of the wall and looked down, as if measuring the depth to which the shingle had been excavated by the waves—some fifteen feet in places—laying bare the masses of stone at the foundation. I objected to him—to his slouch, his shoulders, his coat, his big cigar, everything—more strongly by daylight than gaslight, if possible. However, when he sauntered up and civilly enough asked leave to look at my sketch, I responded amicably.

“Oh, Claude, how *exquisite!* how truly *sweet!*” interposed a sharp voice, and I beheld Madame in an elaborate serge costume of browns and scarlet at my elbow. Claude cut her raptures uncommonly short, and walked her off towards the older and more frequented part of the parade.

I saw no more of them until after luncheon, when, warned by a well-known sensation of stiffness and numbness that open air work was of doubtful prudence in February, I established myself in the sunny drawing-room window with my easel and paints, and a breakwater, some weed-hung piles, a rusty chain and a stranded boat for company. An empty carriage came round to the door, and I heard Mrs. Loseby’s voice in the hall. “Forgotten your cigar-case? I’ll wait for you in here,” and she entered: a beautiful vision in golden tinted velvet, satin and fur; a marvellous costume that almost warmed up her tepid prettiness into beauty.

She saw my approving glance and kindly gave me a better opportunity of admiring her magnificence, placing herself directly in front of me in full sunlight and a well arranged attitude. I did not feel that she would resent the proceeding for a moment, when I took up a fresh block, dipped a brush in raw sienna, and set to work. Loseby was an unconscionable time finding his cigar-case, and I got a very fair sketch of the lady, face and all. She looked sweetly unconscious during the performance, but threw me an arch glance as she passed out. “Ah, I guessed what you were doing. How very wicked of you; but one forgives everything to genius,” she simpered coquettishly.

“Who in the world could she have been?” I wondered, as I put some additional touches to her portrait from memory, and, leaving it to dry, resumed my breakwater. An answer came to my question, through the window, in the course of the next few minutes. Two old gentlemen who had been pottering about the Parade had settled themselves and their cigars on a bench beneath me. “Yes, she’s had the handling of a tidy lot of money from first to last; and now she’s got a husband who’ll help her to make it fly, if I am not much mistaken. I knew her father once—Weatherhead, of Weatherhead and Watkins, drysalters; and I knew her first husband, Tom Perryman. A very decent fellow, Tom; and worth—aye, I might say, a quarter of a million, and be under the figure, when he died; and all left to that chit of a Letty Weatherhead. The will was made before the boy

was born. It's a scandal, sir, that the law doesn't interfere when a man makes such a fool of himself."

Old gentleman Number Two didn't seem interested, and the subject dropped.

The afternoon express brought down an omnibus load of "Saturday to Monday" visitors to the Imperial. The Losebys did not appear at dinner, rather to my disappointment. I was beginning to feel curiously interested in them, and to spend odd moments in wondering how the marriage had come about; what had become of the little son, and divers other unprofitable speculations. There was a constant bustle of fresh arrivals by every train that evening, and the drawing-room was well filled. A "professional" on a holiday had taken possession of the piano, and was giving "reminiscences and imitations" of divers musical stars rather cleverly when I entered, and prominent amongst his audience were Mr. and Mrs. Loseby. She was resplendent as usual, and his attentions as lover-like. How much of genuine was there in them I wondered, as I placed myself in the shadow of a window-curtain unobserved by either, though I was near enough to catch snatches of their conversation in the pauses of the music.

"Not very select here? I dare say not; but I am *not* going to my room just yet. It's not worth dressing just to come down and be hurried up again. I find it too dull to put up with for long."

"We will stay here as long as you please, dearest," he murmured, with a black scowl.

I lost the rest of his sentence.

"Well, there's the ladies' drawing-room—You can't object to that. You may bring me my work there," was her reply.

She handed him her fan, her mousquetaire gloves, her bunch of big white violets. He dropped a filmy white wrap carefully round her shoulders, and they passed from amongst us.

I had the curiosity to look into the ladies' drawing-room an hour or two later. It was about as lively as a station waiting-room. Mrs. Loseby sat listless and cross, in a big chair, her hands folded idly on the crewel work in her lap. She looked so chagrined and at odds with life in general, that I was touched, and unwitting of etiquette, entered, and made my way to her.

"I want to show you something, and ask if you are very much offended with me," I said, producing my little sketch of her.

"Oh, you clever, dreadful creature! I shall never forgive you, never! What a sweet thing you have made of it!" was the lady's response. "But it's too utterly flattering; you have made me look young—actually young and happy."

"And why not?" was the fitting rejoinder. She gave me one of her glances. "Why, I'm ever so old," she tittered, "and happy? ah, no one knows what I have gone through! Riches and rank aren't everything, Mr. Sherratt; and Losthaven isn't exactly the place to get one's spirits up in, either."

"You find it dull?" I inquired.

"Well, I suppose, considering the circumstances" (this with a simper)—"that's a shocking thing to say, but I do. I couldn't imagine why Claude brought me to such a dull hole, after Paris, but he heard that his father and sister, that's Lord Rotherwode and the Honourable Cecilia Saxon, were to be at Boatstown this month. They were all against his marriage, you know, but he says when they see *me*"—she paused in modest confusion, while I made the appropriate rejoinder, and continued: "They were very rude about my poor dear first husband having made his money in trade. As if it mattered! and my papa can never forgive dear Claude having been a little wild and extravagant, like all the aristocracy. Ah, I've a deal to put up with, Mr. Sherratt."

I was wondering how far her confidences would carry her, when I saw the unpleasant-faced chambermaid pass the door and take a rapid survey of us all in a second's glance.

"There, that's another of my troubles. My maid left for some ridiculous reason, and didn't Claude go and arrange for *that* woman to attend on me while I'm here! A hateful creature, always prowling about and spying after me." She looked at my sketch uneasily.

"I was going to ask your leave to keep it," I said, evidently much to her relief. "I shan't show it to anyone till it's finished."

"How I wish Dooly could have seen it," she said suddenly, in quite a different tone to her usual affected one. "He *would* be pleased. 'Pity mamma' he always calls me. I mean Julius, my little son. He is just three years old and such a dear, wee fellow. He lives with my papa, but is to come to us, of course, when we are in our own house. I'm his sole guardian. Poor dear Perryman trusted me absolutely, and I say papa has no right to talk of making him a ward in Chancery."

I was struck by the change for the better in her manner when her child was mentioned. There was a ring of genuine motherly feeling in her sharp voice, and almost an expression of interest in her doll's face. I don't know what instinct made me cut the interview as short as I civilly could. As I made my way down the corridor to my room I caught a glimpse of a hard, white face and a pair of bold black eyes scanning me from the gloom of an open doorway—No. 25. I returned the stare with interest, and the woman vanished.

Next morning, Sunday, there was an imposing muster of the faithful, in tall hats and long coats or gorgeous church-going bonnets, as the case might be, in the hall of the Imperial. I, conscious of a rough suit and soft felt hat, waited till the worshippers and their prayer-books should have cleared off, before starting on a reckless Sabbath-breaking tramp through the woods. Down the staircase rustled Mrs. Loseby with much gleam of satin and clatter of bangles. She stopped half way and looked about, eagerly, I fancied, till she spied me. She beckoned me and spoke over the banisters.

"You are not going to church? Will you post this for me?" In a lower tone: "I dare not trust it to anyone about me."

I raised my hand to receive the letter, when a longer arm than mine was stretched up from somewhere behind me and her husband's white fingers closed on it.

"My dearest, why trouble Mr. Sherratt? I must go to the post-office after church."

I turned sharply and caught his eyes fixed on me with a wicked look that melted, as I gazed, into one of polite deprecation. The bells began to ring and they passed on, he carrying her dainty little church service with ostentatious care. "A most devoted husband—or Gaoler—which?" I asked myself.

Off to the woods—masses of bluish purple leafless stems and twigs—just then tipped with a warm golden brown in the distance, where the leaf buds were swelling under the bark. A walk over the hills to the rectory of an old school-fellow, afternoon service in a primitive little chapel with a congregation of nine, and back again through the deepening twilight that just lasted till the distant bells of Losthaven struck on my ear. It was quite night before I reached the hotel. I could just make out clusters of shadowy forms on the Parade, against the sea. There was to be a high tide that night—always an exciting event in Losthaven. As I entered the hall, Loseby came running downstairs, a lady's fur cloak thrown over his shoulder.

"Ah! good evening," he said, in a most friendly manner. "Only just home? You've had a glorious day. Done any sketching? You should come out and look at the tide. I never saw the Channel look so full. Lucky for Losthaven the wind is north, what there is of it. Have a cigar?" I thanked him and declined. He stopped to light his at a gas jet. "My wife is out there. She wouldn't come in, so I have been finding a wrap for her." He seemed to take for granted that I was coming with him, so I did, for no other reason.

We strolled up the Parade, till we came to a barrier of tubs and planks, where the asphalte was still soft. "This way," he said, striding over it. "I left her sitting here—Why—where can she be? We must have passed her. Perhaps she got cold sitting so long."

Certainly no one was in sight on that end of the sea-wall, and we turned back, scanning each dark group carefully, as we passed them. I was footsore, and when we regained the hotel, left Loseby to continue his chase and made for my room. I dawdled over dressing, and it was nearly half an hour later when I heard shouts on the Parade, and what seemed a sudden rush of footsteps with excited voices intermixed. It was too dark to see anything from my window. "Ah! the water has got over at last," was my reflection, till the footsteps and voices seemed to draw nearer and nearer. I opened my door. There was some commotion in the hall and on the staircase, and while I looked a little crowd appeared at the end of our corridor, moving slowly and carefully. I saw the

manager of the hotel, and one of the leading doctors of the place, and beyond them, Mr. Loseby's ghastly face. They all stopped in a little cluster at the door of No. 25, and then I saw that two of the hotel servants were carrying something between them on a mattress. Another doctor and some of the chambermaids were following.

"What has happened?" I asked the first person I met. It was the disagreeable looking chambermaid who was hurrying along with a jug of hot water.

"A lady has fallen over the edge of the wall and killed herself. The coastguard found her, and brought her home," she answered curtly.

There was a wet track along the gay new carpet, and up the stairs. It led along over the encaustic tiles of the hall to the door, a trail of dripping garments and trampling feet. The coastguard stood on the steps and another man—a workman in Sunday clothes—beside him.

"He saw her first," said the coastguard, "and gave me a call. The water was just up to her face as she lay"—He broke off, for Mr. Loseby pressed through the throng of idlers in the doorway and disappeared within the room. A few minutes later the doctor emerged in close consultation with the manager.

"Fatal? Not a bit of it! She'll be all right after a night's sleep. The fall wouldn't kill her. A big stone had got loose and rolled after her, and that stunned her. If she had been left ten minutes or so longer she would have been drowned, I suppose; as it is, beyond some bruises and a possible shock to the nerves, she will be none the worse. You keep that corridor quiet. None of the other rooms are occupied, I hear? Very well. Keep them empty for the present. I'll be round early to-morrow."

The manager interviewed me a little later in the evening and offered me a larger and very much better room in exchange for mine, but I resolutely declined to move. I had begun a sketch from the window and wanted to finish it. He didn't persist. I found heavy curtains hung over the end of the corridor and over the room door when I went up that night, and betook myself noiselessly to bed.

I met the doctor, with whom I was slightly acquainted, next morning, after his visit. "Doing very well," was his reply to my inquiries. "More frightened than hurt. Her husband seems needlessly fidgety. Talks of having further advice—of course I can't object—but there is no real occasion."

"These country doctors!" said Loseby, with much contempt, when I congratulated him on his wife's escape. "What chances can they have of studying the more complicated cases of nerve disease. It is my wife's *mind* I fear for: such a shock may unhinge it utterly. She has been terrified out of her senses, and if her father comes down while she is in this state, I declare I believe it will kill her."

"He is coming?" I asked.

"Of course—we hope so," he answered, turning sharply away into the hotel.

The bright weather held out, and I conscientiously made the most of it—spending another day out of doors and returning at dusk. I stole to my room on tip-toe. All was silent in No. 25, but in a few minutes I saw the curtain over the door drawn aside and the maid's face look out. I kept carefully out of her sight within my half-open door. I don't know why, except that her eyes were so ugly to meet. She came out at last and hurried away rapidly. I wanted a light and some dinner, and prepared to follow her, when I heard a queer noise in the passage like a knocking with a muffled hammer. Beat! Beat! Beat! It was in No. 25. I hurried out. Someone was beating the door panels with the palm of the hand, and a voice—Mrs. Loseby's, grown weak and shaky—was crying inside :

"Oh, who is there? Help me! Let me out! Let me out!"

I saw the key was in the lock of the door, but hesitated to interfere.

The frantic beating re-commenced. "Is anyone there? Help me! Let me out."

"It is I—Paul Sherratt—Mrs. Loseby. What do you want?" I asked—as anyone would have done.

"Let me out. Take me away before they kill me!"

"Here is your maid," I said hastily, for I saw the curtains move at the corridor end. She was silent directly, and I stepped back into my room. The maid was carrying a lamp in front of her, so could see nothing beyond it. I waited till I heard her enter and lock herself in, and then went down. Loseby was dining. I took a seat near him. He looked paler than ever: his eyes were red and the crooked lines about their corners more strongly accentuated. He didn't seem to get on with his dinner, which on the whole showed proper feeling. Poor fellow—why didn't I pity him? His whole air was that of a man devoured by anxiety and eager for sympathy. Directly I spoke of his wife, he broke out with the story of all his woes and perplexities. How could he leave her in the hands of these benighted country practitioners; and yet at the very name of a London physician she had become so alarmed about herself that she had fallen into the very state of nervous agitation it was most desirable to avoid. If he had only any lady friend at hand to consult. He had implored his sister to come, but she couldn't leave her invalid father. I let him run on, listening and sympathizing with one half my brain, while the other was deep in pondering over a question of chirognomy, *i.e.*, whether the lines of the hand can be modified by long-continued effort—as resolute persistence in an expression eventually modifies those of the face. All that I most objected to in Loseby's face disappeared as he spoke with sad earnestness, but the ominous curve of those cruel, clutching fingers remained unchanged.

He departed early that night, to take his share of the watching, and when I passed the veiled door of No. 25, all was quiet.

The next day I went out early and came in late, running against the doctor on the steps. He didn't stop to speak to me, but the manager informed me there had been some unpleasantness between him and Mr. Loseby, who was anxious to take his wife away at once. The doctor had objected strongly; had said it was the worst thing they could do.

I saw Loseby in the smoking-room. He was going to Hastings next morning to see about rooms, and meant to arrange for an invalid carriage and to have a doctor in waiting on their arrival. The maid she had at present would accompany them. He took down my address carefully, and hoped to see me in town, and then said "Good-bye," as it was unlikely we should meet before his departure.

I looked at the door as I passed that night, but all was silent.

I was getting to feel that I had had enough of the place, and to wonder whether it was worth staying till Friday. The next day's sunshine faded at noon, and a cold grey mist blew up from the sea. I hurried back to the Imperial, chilly and discontented, and shut myself in my room, determined to pack up as soon as ever the sketch from my window was completed. The place was intensely quiet. I could hear the bleating of the sheep in a distant field, and the voices of the children calling to one another on the shore. When I began to analyse the indistinct murmurs that fell on my ear, I became aware of something that was not the sea or the buzz of voices in the coffee-room—a subdued, monotonous sound, nearer at hand.

I opened my door and listened.

A woman's voice, unmistakably, that rose and fell in a faint, smothered wail. I walked as noisily as I could down the passage and back, whistling softly.

The wailing ceased suddenly, and then the door was violently, desperately shaken.

"Let me out! Send for the police! Help! Murder!"

"The door is locked," I said, trying it. "How can I help you, Mrs. Loseby?"

"Ah! They have me fast. I shall never go from here but to my grave," she moaned.

"What can I do for you? Tell me quickly," I said.

"Get me something to write with."

I ran to my room, selected paper, envelope, and a long, thin pencil, and going back tried to push them under the door. It fitted all too well over the heavy Saxony carpet. I got them through the keyhole at last. She murmured some eager thanks. "You must return them in the same way," I whispered. "I will watch here and post your letter."

I walked to the far end of the corridor, and pushing aside the curtain, kept watch for some ten minutes; at the end of which I saw the pretty, quaint cap worn by all the chambermaids of the hotel surmounting the ugly, lowering black fringe of Mrs. Loseby's maid emerge from below, just in time to stride back to the door, whisper a word of

caution, and regain my own den before she entered the passage. When I next ventured out, the key was in the lock inside and all was still.

I spent that afternoon hanging about the place, wondering what I ought to do. When, to my relief, I recognised the doctor's neat brougham in waiting at the hotel door, I hurried down and begged a few moments' attention. He listened to all I told him gravely, but with no surprise.

"It is unfortunately the case that the poor lady's brain has not recovered the shock of that night's terror and exposure. She was allowed to get over-excited about something next day, and her husband attributes the distressing consequences to my treatment. I do not attempt to justify myself; I have no occasion to do so; and, personally, I rejoice that he has decided to put the case into other hands, though on the lady's account I feel grave anxiety as to the consequences of the journey."

I thanked him and returned to my painting, working with my door ajar—awaiting events. None befell. Loseby returned late. I avoided seeing him, and kept out of his way during the bustle of departure next morning.

I saw Mrs. Loseby's huge basket-trunks being piled on the private omnibus, in which a couch had been arranged for the invalid. Loseby and the maid ran up and down laden with air-cushions, railway wraps and foot warmers, and, at the last possible moment, poor Mrs. Loseby appeared, cloaked and veiled, and treading falteringly. They supported her carefully to the carriage. I ventured to approach the door and raise my hat in farewell.

"You will find something for you in my room: go and get it," she called out suddenly, sitting bolt upright, her eyes shining bright and eager. Loseby, who had turned to speak to the manager, heard her. "My dearest!" he exclaimed, jumping into the carriage hastily. I saw her cower down in her corner as they drove off.

I ran up to their rooms as fast as I could. No. 24, their sitting-room, was empty, with the song I had heard the poor lady sing (could it be only six days ago), lying forgotten on the piano.

No. 25, the bed-room, was in the hands of the chambermaids, who had already stripped the bed and turned the place topsy-turvy.

"Have you seen—a note—or a pencilled scrap—lying about anywhere?" I inquired.

"No, sir. Nothing of the sort." I gave a look into the empty grate and the dust-pan, with no result. My pencil lay on the toilet glass. "Poor lady, she meant that, I suppose," I said, and pocketed it.

Half an hour later, Losthaven and the Imperial lay some twenty miles behind me on the road to London.

That little holiday left an uneasy feeling behind it: and I put away my sketches of the place.

The season began. I found work enough to keep hands and brain

profitably employed: nevertheless, day and night my mind would wander to that unfortunate lady, wondering what had become of her. Some power seemed to be urging me to go back to Losthaven to see—or hear: and there were odd moments when I thought it would prevail. May and June came and went with their sunshine and gaiety and dust, and July followed hot and steaming.

"I want you to take a holiday with me," said a certain amiable, poetic-souled artist-friend of mine, Oscar Schmidt by name, one Friday morning. "I want you to come to-morrow with me to Losthaven."

"Losthaven!" I exclaimed. "Why?"

"To see her: My love."—(He said "loaf," but I knew what he meant.) Oscar was in the habit of making his remarks as curt and impressive as possible. The love was Pauline Archdale. She and her people were staying at the hotel at Losthaven. I told Schmidt I would be ready. We were great friends, he and I. I entered Losthaven this time in blazing sunlight, in a crowded omnibus; Schmidt opposite in gorgeous apparel with a glowing æsthetic neck-tie and tight yellow kid gloves.

The Imperial was adding a wing to itself, half the size of the original building. My old bed-room had been knocked into a passage, and I was put into No. 252, up in the roof.

Oscar, who had been in a sort of stolid flutter all the way from the station, dragged me out forthwith in search of his love, whom we found under the care of a severe mamma on the lawn; half a dozen London acquaintances of theirs and of mine, surrounding them. We all dined together.

My mind was full of Oscar and his hopes when we ascended the well-known staircase that night. He held me by the arm, pouring confidences into my sympathizing ear as I turned mechanically with him down the corridor which once led to my room—and I can conscientiously avow that no thought of my old experiences crossed my mind for an instant.

He came to a sudden stop. "Ah! what am I about? My room is a floor nearer heaven than this." We both laughed, but quietly, as it was discreditably late, and silence and slumber reigned around us. We turned to go back, but stopped again as by one impulse.

"Hark! What was that?"

I felt my breath catch as I heard distinctly the soft beating of a palm on the panels of the closed door on my left hand. It was No. 25.

"Someone called you, Paul," said Schmidt, his eyes wide with astonishment. "But who?"

We listened again. Nothing. We stood some few minutes without speaking or moving. Still nothing. Schmidt laughed, shrugged his shoulders and moved on; I followed more slowly. As we turned from the corridor on to the staircase landing, I heard it again. Beat. Beat. Beat. I ran softly back: it grew louder. The door was shaken

frantically, desperately. I laid my hand on the latch and all was instantly still.

Hurrying off to my room, with a curt adieu to Schmidt, I sat down to hold a serious inquiry into the state of my mind and nerves. Deciding that I was over-tired and that sleep would be out of the question, I filled my pipe and went down, intending to walk the Parade as long as my legs would carry me, and perhaps consult a doctor next morning. Opening my portmanteau in search of a favourite cap, there on the top of my possessions lay the old portfolio of *Losthaven* sketches. How I had come to pack it, I cannot imagine.

The manager—a new one—was in the hall. He looked surprised when I mentioned my intention of walking the Parade till sunrise, or perhaps later; but was civil. I asked him if he could tell me who had No. 25, now. He referred politely to his books and said “No one.”

“When was it last occupied?” I continued. “Not since I have been here,” returned he.

“But why not?”

“Pure chance,” replied he, sleepily. “We have never been quite full yet.”

“A sick lady and her husband occupied those rooms when I was here in February. She had met with an accident. They afterwards went away to Hastings.”

“Ay, poor thing, I have heard them talk of it here,” said the manager. “She died very soon.”

“Died?”

“Yes. I think she only lived a day or two.”

Wishing him good-night, I went out to the Parade, mind and brain alike busy.

I saw Oscar off to church in the wake of Pauline next day, and then resolutely made my way to the scene of my last night's fancies. All was light and stir in the corridor. A passing chambermaid smilingly produced her master-key and admitted me into No. 25, at my request, and left me there. I drew up the blind and let in the sunshine, and seating myself in a big chintz-covered chair, began quietly to contemplate my surroundings as one stares at the familiar shapes around one to gather reassurance after the terrors of a dream. A handsomely furnished room. Plenty of looking-glass, carved wood, and Japanese pottery about; evidently one of the grandest rooms the Imperial possessed. I looked at the Indian-patterned chintz, the Empire clock and vases, with a determined interest, and yet all my mind was full, despite myself, of the one dark picture. The helpless victim dying here, inch by inch, under the cruel eyes of her murderers. “Better that he had killed her outright that night,” I said, and then started to my feet in consternation at the end to which my vagrant imaginings had led me.

"Killed her? what put such a horrible notion into my head?" I pulled down the blind and left the room at once.

It was impossible to resist a further experiment that night. "Come this way, Schmidt, for a moment," I said, taking his arm and leading him down that accursed corridor, as we were going up to bed. "I want to satisfy myself ——"

"Paul! What is it?" he broke in. "I heard it again. It says 'Help! Murder!'"

I had heard nothing; but, while he spoke, the frantic beating at the door commenced and then the low moaning and wailing.

It sank into silence as we stopped speaking, and we looked at one another in dire amaze.

"I must have that room to-night, whatever it costs," I declared. Oscar cordially approved the idea, and we sought out the manager and effected the change.

Oscar sat talking with me in the bright July moonlight for some hours, which passed in perfect quietness. I told him the story of my previous visit, and showed him my little sketch of Mrs. Loseby which I found in the old portfolio. He was profoundly interested, he averred: but soon his head fell back on the sofa cushion, and he became lost to all outer impressions.

Throwing myself on the bed, I sank into a dreamless sleep, from which I was awakened by a sound as of someone moving near me. "Hallo, Schmidt," I called out. There was no answer. Oscar had got tired of his sofa and retreated to his own room an hour before. "A dream, I suppose," I said to myself. But in the same moment I distinctly heard the sound again. Someone seemed to be moving gently, as with bare feet, across the floor.

I struck a match and lighted a candle. Nothing visible except my own uncomfortable form reflected in a mirror over the fireplace. Then I got up, undressed, and went to bed in earnest, leaving two candles alight near me. Sleep again, not so deep as before on account of the lighted room: and again awakened by the soft patter of footsteps; then the rustle of paper and the cautious closing of a drawer. I was sitting up, wide awake, and staring around before the sound ceased. Silence: emptiness; and the quiet morning light filling every corner of the room through the uncurtained windows.

My night's rest was over now. I got up and dressed, considering the while what I should say to Schmidt. The footsteps all sounded on this side of the room, I thought, between the bed and dressing-table—and then would come the sound of the drawer closing. The toilette table was an elaborate affair with many drawers large and small. I began to pull them open. They were all neatly lined with fresh white lining paper. I looked into every corner and under the lining of each, but saw nothing. Then I pulled them quite out. One stuck fast, and on feeling round its edge I found a sheet of crumpled paper that had got between the drawer and its case. I drew it out care-

fully. It was covered with close pencil writing, quite legible; and I sat down to read it.

“*MY DEAREST FATHER*,—I was a disobedient child to you and I have been rightly punished. I am dying and I don’t care to live except to disappoint my wicked, wicked husband. Don’t let him have Julius—Don’t. He will murder my little boy and then everything will be his. Oh, I have been a foolish woman! I have left him Dooly’s guardian, but I thought he was everything that was good. Take care of Julius, dear Papa. When that bad man knows that I have told you, what I solemnly swear is true, that he has tried to kill me—I saw him throw the great stone on me when I was lying where he had pushed me over the sea-wall and where he hoped I should lie till I was drowned—he will not dare to come near my boy. He has given me poison since. I saw him. I am in such pain I do not want to live unless to see my little son once more. *Ask Mr. Paul Sherratt what he knows.*

“Your unhappy child,

“*LETITIA LOSEBY.*”

The lines seemed to have been scrawled hastily, but the signature was clear and firm. The sheet of note paper was the one I had given her, bearing my address embossed in one corner. When Oscar came to me in the morning, I was still pondering over this revelation that held the key to the terrible mystery of that closed door.

After consideration, we agreed that I should draw up an account of the whole affair, including my previous acquaintance with the Losebys, but suppressing all reference to the supernatural; which, with the little water colour portrait, Oscar would take to London and convey to old Mr. Weatherhead—who no doubt would be readily found.

“I shall await news from you *here*, at Losthaven, Schmidt,” I said. “I must live my fancies down at any risk. I shall sleep in this room every night till I can do so undisturbed.”

I am writing there at this moment. On my desk lies a letter, which gives me the information that closes all.

The boy Julius is safe. That scoundrel Loseby had actually commenced to take legal proceedings to obtain possession of the child. All that is at an end. He met Schmidt (unsuspiciously) at Mr. Weatherhead’s office, and disappeared immediately, that very day, unable to face further inquiry. The boy is safe. Does the poor mother’s anxious spirit rest in peace, or have my morbid fancies gradually worn themselves out for lack of encouragement? Which-ever it is, my story ends here.

My light burns low—a cold waning moon looks in on me; in the distance the great clock of Losthaven Church booms a melancholy “Two,” and the night and I are alone in the haunted room, Number Twenty-five.

THE EVE OF ST. PARTRIDGE.

BY JEAN MIDDLEMASS.

THERE is much talk of guns, and bags, and birds, and keepers, among the men assembled in the smoking-room at Fotherington Manor on the last evening in August, but expectant though they all are, and excited about the morrow's sport, the name of Mrs. Bulmer wanders in among their sporting conversation very frequently.

Who is Mrs. Bulmer? is a query that passes from lip to lip. Yet no one in the room can answer the question, unless it is a grave, dark man who sits smoking by the window, and has not vouchsafed a remark.

That Mrs. Bulmer is beautiful, very beautiful, no one seems to gainsay, and that she is a widow they all seem to be agreed, since their hostess has told them so; but where she has come from, and why none of them—men about town though most of them are—have ever seen her before, is a mystery which perplexes them not a little.

She does not look more than nineteen, has fair hair, the softest blue eyes, a smile that has already driven Algy Merrick, of the Life Guards, so crazy that, crack shot though he is, it will be strange if he does not miss more than a few birds to-morrow, and she is dressed with a perfection that proclaims her a woman of many resources.

After, Who is she? comes the question, What has she?

But a satisfactory reply was as far off as ever. The dark, grave man smiled as if his own thoughts amused him, but he did not speak. Algy Merrick, however, observed the smile, stealthy though it was.

"Come, come, Arthur, you know all about her. Give us, without further delay, the history of this charming Mrs. Bulmer."

Arthur shook his head. "You fellows have been amusing me for the last half-hour, trying to make a mystery where none exists. Julia Anson, one of the prettiest girls in Cumberland, was married at seventeen to old Bulmer, of Bulmer Court. It is the old story—she married him to save her father, who was a terrible spendthrift, from him, and the old fellow rewarded her by dying at the end of six months, and leaving her a widow with five thousand a-year."

"Five thousand a-year!" The words acted as an electric shock.

"Ay, clear," went on Arthur, taking a long whiff at his meerschaum. "She has no children, and having mourned in privacy for the last eighteen months, she has been induced to accept our hostess, Mrs. Taunton's, invitation, and visit Fotherington Manor for the Feast of St. Partridge."

"And you have known her for a long time?"

"Yes, off and on. I knew her when she was Julia Anson."

"She is charming; positively, absolutely charming!" exclaimed Algy Merrick enthusiastically. His strong encomium, however, only called forth a quick, sharp flash from Arthur's dark eyes, then he half closed them again, and knocking the ashes out of his pipe, he stalked off to bed without vouchsafing another word.

"Queer fellow, Arthur Seymour," said one of the party when he had closed the door. "He is so spasmodic."

"Got something on his mind," remarked another man, "he is as mysterious as Mrs. Bulmer, for say what he likes I feel sure there is a mystery about her and am not so certain that Master Arthur is not mixed up in it."

"Arthur Seymour is not to be allowed to carry off that fair young beauty as a prize for silence, if that is what you mean," cried Algy Merrick. "Why he has not got a rap."

"And you, Algy?" laughed the former speaker. "Yet I shrewdly suspect you have intentions."

"Oh! I—well I have not much money certainly, but I have expectations and—"

"Come, I'll bet you fifty pounds that Arthur has a better chance than you have."

"Done," and Algy Merrick threw up his head, twirled his moustache, and tried to look the thorough lady-killer he believed himself to be. And very good-looking he certainly was in his blue velvet smoking suit with its ruffles of old point.

There was a good deal of laughing over the wager, which was duly booked, and the lookers-on strolled off to bed in full expectation of having some sport that Partridge-tide, which would not come within the range of their double-barrelled Mantons.

Before the clock had struck twelve, all the male inmates of the house had been told of the wager, which was of course to be carefully guarded from the ladies and Arthur. The host naturally was also excluded, but then he was old, and a cypher—merely the host.

Meantime the fair object of all this intrigue had taken off the gauzy white dress in which she had played such havoc with Algy Merrick's heart, and attired in a pale grey dressing-gown, her fair hair forming a natural veil about her shoulders, was sitting by the window gazing for the most part on the starry firmament, though every now and then she turned the page of a book which was lying on her knee.

Mrs. Bulmer had evidently no intention of seeking repose. Her own thoughts seemed to keep her very wakeful, and as she sat there her face, though a bright and joyous one, had obviously for a time been touched by some sorrow which rendered her pensive, almost sad.

One o'clock struck by the little clock on the mantel-piece of her room. For at least half an hour she had not moved. Now she got up, looked out for a second or two into the silent night, and finally closed the window. Just as she did so, a little tap came at the door.

Mrs. Bulmer started as though she were half afraid, and then she uttered a decided "Come in."

A dark, bright-eyed laughing girl obeyed the summons.

"Oh, Julia! I was so afraid you would be asleep, and I have such a bit of fun to tell you."

"Something that will not keep till the morning, Mimi? Why are you not in bed long ago, you naughty child?"

"I am only two years younger than you, Julia, and you are not thinking of sleeping. But never mind—only listen to what I have to tell you." And Mimi Taunton, for Julia's nocturnal visitor was the daughter of the house, knelt down beside the chair into which Mrs. Bulmer had thrown herself.

"You know my boudoir is at the end of the long corridor," began Mimi, in an excited tone; "and in the little room next to it Jack Burnett has been put to sleep, because the house is full and he is only a boy."

"Yes—well?"

"Well, mamma told me I was to write the menus for to-morrow's dinner, and as I intend to pass to-morrow in the woods I thought I would take time by the forelock and do them to-night."

"And what has happened?"

"Just as I had got about half through them I heard an awful noise in the next room. It was Percy Wilmot trying to wake Jack Burnett, who was fast asleep—boys always do want so much sleep."

"And did he succeed?" asked Mrs. Bulmer, half wearied.

"I should think he did, and what he told him you would give your ears to know."

"What was it—though, stop; one ought not to listen."

"I didn't listen, I heard. Boys should be more careful; it is their fault, not mine, if secrets are revealed. This one concerns you. A bet of fifty pounds has been laid about you to-night."

"About me, Mimi? What do you mean?"

"Why, Captain Merrick, whom I rather meant to flirt with myself, has taken a bet with Major Ricketts that he will win you and distance Arthur Seymour, your old friend, whom the Major has a sort of suspicion is in love with you."

Mrs. Bulmer started up from her chair, and catching on to the arm of it as though to steady herself, turned very pale.

"And Arthur—Mr. Seymour—does he know anything of this?"

"Not a word. There would be no fun if he knew. Julia, you must not betray me; you must keep your own counsel and act, not talk. Why, you look quite frightened over it! Now, if it were only me instead of you, what sport it would be. I would teach them to lay wagers about me!"

"I wonder what you would do?" queried Mrs. Bulmer, with a smile.

"Do! Why I would flirt with this impudent Captain Alg

Merrick till I drove him perfectly silly and then I would leave him planté là to pay his fifty pounds and be laughed at by all his friends."

"It might be a dangerous game, Mimi. You yourself might have your affections engaged."

"Julia! It cannot be possible that you are in love with Captain Merrick?"

"Why, Mimi, I never saw him in my life till this evening."

"Of course not, how silly I am," laughed Mimi. "Dear me, this is a beginning to our shooting party. You *will* do the thing thoroughly, won't you, Julia?"

Mrs. Bulmer could not help laughing at the girl's energy.

"I'll do the best I can—yes—but there are reasons I cannot explain, which make the position rather difficult. I thank you for warning me, however; you have done me a greater service than you even intended."

And then Mimi kissed her friend, bade her rely on her assistance and silence, and crept very quietly upstairs to her room.

She would perhaps have decided that the hour when her assistance would be acceptable was not so very far distant had she seen Julia Bulmer sink down once more into the chair by the window, and remain there for a long while motionless, lost in such deep, grave thought as the contemplation of no mere country house wager could have produced.

Next morning when the house-party met at breakfast there was still a shadow on Mrs. Bulmer's brow, beautiful though she looked in the dark mourning clothes which she had not yet wholly cast off. Mimi did not fail to notice it, and as she passed her whispered, "Be brave. I will help you."

Next Mrs. Bulmer was seated Algy Merrick. For a few seconds Mrs. Bulmer scarcely noticed him. She seemed absorbed by her own thoughts, but two or three flashing glances from Mimi awoke her to a recollection of what was required of her, and she began to chat very pleasantly with the guardsman. She looked round the table and saw amusement depicted on all the male faces excepting Arthur's; he looked graver and sterner than ever, and during the whole of breakfast was never heard to utter a word.

The start for the woods was made, the ladies from the windows watching the shooters sally forth. Algy Merrick stood till the last moment, leaning against the porch talking to Julia. "We will meet again at luncheon up at Vidal's Bar, where there is a Druid temple," he said, and then he lifted his hat with a grace on which he prided himself, and followed the rest of the party; congratulating himself that he had made so successful a beginning, and already deciding in his own mind that the widow and the wager were won.

As for Arthur Seymour, he did not take the slightest notice of Mrs. Bulmer except when absolute politeness demanded it. Certainly there was nothing in his behaviour that betokened a deep interest in

the young widow, and yet there was not one among all that shooting party but felt intuitively that there was some magnetic power that linked these two together. In no one was the instinct more fully developed than in Mimi; she knew nothing of their antecedent acquaintance, yet she could not help suspecting that Arthur's cool indifference had a good deal to do with Julia's warmth of manner to Captain Merrick.

"It is quite interesting," quoth Mimi to herself, "almost as good as having a love affair of one's own. But I don't mean Algy Merrick to win his wager if I can help it."

So she started forth in search of Julia, and proceeded to pat her, metaphorically, on the back.

"Go on, dear; go on as you have begun. Arthur won't be able to stand it very long. He is frightfully in love I am sure. He will be at your feet before long and Captain Merrick will lose his wager."

"Mimi, what do you mean? What do you know about Arthur. I have not seen him till yesterday—since—since I married Mr. Bulmer; and ——"

"Very likely," returned Mimi. "For all that, you are as much in love with him, as he is with you."

"You are mistaken, Mimi, indeed you are. There is nothing between Mr. Arthur Seymour and me. In fact I think I should be rather fascinated by that good-looking Captain Merrick if I could get over the impertinence of the wager."

"Oh Julia, it isn't true?" and Mimi's laughing face clouded over very perceptibly, and she made up her mind that she would try the effect of a few of her dashing remarks on Arthur. She had known him, more or less, all her life, and was not afraid of his grave, silent ways.

Two days passed, however, and Arthur gave her no opportunity to converse with him, but kept very much aloof from everyone, announcing it as his intention to leave Fotherington Manor on the 4th and go on to another country house about fifteen miles off.

Twice had the whole house-party met for luncheon at Vidal's Bar, and the flirtation between Algy Merrick and the widow was progressing so rapidly that everyone looked on the affair as settled; Major Ricketts' grimness of countenance only being second to that of Arthur whenever he thought of his lost fifty pounds.

Still Algy Merrick had not proposed. Good breeding told him that the time which had elapsed since his introduction to the widow was rather short; and besides there was something in Arthur Seymour's manner which affected his spirits without his exactly knowing why. "He would wait," he thought, "till this kill-joy Arthur had removed himself which he would do on the morrow, and then the coast being absolutely clear, there would be no farther difficulty about the matter, since he felt quite sure of the lady."

Events, however, were not going to turn out quite as propitiously as Algy expected.

On the morning of the 4th, a telegram was placed before Arthur Seymour while he sat at breakfast. Evidently some event of importance had occurred, for his usually pale face grew crimson as he read it, but he thrust it hastily into his pocket without uttering a word. Only towards the end of breakfast he said to his hostess :

"I am afraid, Mrs. Taunton, you will be saddled with me till the evening. Some news I have just received necessitates an entire change in my plans."

"My dear Arthur, you know this house is yours to go and come as you like. You have had no bad news, I hope?"

"My uncle, Sir Wilfrid Grant, is dead," returned Arthur, sadly. "I must go North without delay."

"Your mother's brother?"

"Yes. My mother was with him when he died. She telegraphs to me to come to her at once; but there is no quick train from here till the evening. I know that, from past experience."

This announcement of Arthur's cast an inevitable shade over the whole party, but more especially on Algy Merrick, who had expected Arthur to leave early, when he intended to avoid the shooters under the pretext of being tired, and devote the morning to winning his cause with the widow.

Now breakfast was no sooner over, and the party separated about in different quarters, than Mrs. Bulmer sought Arthur Seymour out in the library, where he was sitting alone writing letters in connection with the recent event. They had scarcely spoken for days, but Julia had known Arthur too long not to feel that it was imperative she should go and condole with him in his sorrow; more especially as Sir Wilfrid Grant's place adjoined Bulmer Court, and she was really sorry about the old man's death.

He looked up when she entered, and started as though he had seen a ghost.

"Julia—Mrs. Bulmer!"

"I have come to tell you, Arthur, how much I condole with you in your grief," she said, very simply; calling him by his Christian name as she had done from childhood.

"Ay, it is true I need condolence, though, perhaps, scarcely from you." And having fixed his eyes once more on his papers, he did not attempt to raise them.

"Not from me? What have I done to displease you? Oh, Arthur, why are you so changed, so unkind to me? But it does not matter. I only came to tell you I was sorry about poor Sir Wilfrid; since you do not wish to hear it, I will not intrude." And she turned to leave the room.

Another moment and he was by her side.

"Julia, tell me the truth. Do you not love Algy Merrick?"

"It can matter but little to you whom I love," she answered.

"Not matter! Have I not loved you for years? When you

married Bulmer, did I not go abroad in the vain hope of forgetting you, and nearly die of brain fever at Genoa."

"And when you recovered, and came back to England, I was a widow," she suggested with some archness, yet blushing vividly.

"Yes, a rich widow, and I was a poor man. You were farther off from me than ever."

Mrs. Bulmer stood looking at him in a state bordering on bewilderment.

"And this was the reason of your coldness and estrangement?" she said at last. "My poor Arthur, how I have misjudged you! And now ——"

"Now I am no longer a poor Admiralty clerk, but my uncle's heir; while you have, I believe, already pledged your word to Algy Merrick."

"I have no more intention of marrying Captain Merrick than of performing a journey to the moon," she said, advancing to the open window as she spoke. "I have only been tantalising him into the belief that he has won a wager of fifty pounds."

As she finished the sentence, a figure flitted across the verandah only a few yards from where Julia Bulmer was standing. It was Algy Merrick. He had heard every word of that last sentence. Luckily he did not stop for more, or the shout of joy which Arthur uttered might have shattered his nerves, and the sight of Julia in Arthur's arms, in which she was encircled not two minutes later, might have paralysed him for life.

As it was, it was Algy Merrick, not Arthur Seymour who was called away from Fotherington Manor by important business that morning. When the shooters returned, Major Ricketts found a check for fifty pounds lying in an envelope on his table, with only the one word "Lost," for explanation.

That Mrs. Bulmer had refused him was the general supposition among the smokers that evening, for it was not till long after the party had broken up that the mystery was fully cleared by a paragraph in the *Morning Post* to the effect that Mrs. Bulmer, of Bulmer Court, was about to be led to the altar by Mr. Arthur Seymour.

Of course, Mimi was asked to be principal bridesmaid, but she gave it as her intention that she would have nothing whatever to do with the wedding unless Captain Algy Merrick was invited, and being a young lady of much decision of character, she carried her point. The result of the gay doings at Bulmer Court is, that another wedding may be expected before the season is over—at least, so wise folks say.

STRESS OF WEATHER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "COUNTESS VIOLET."

OF course it was very cold, but fine seasonable weather. So said each of the three middle-aged gentleman as they drew themselves up for a final warm at their dining-room fires, waited on by such feminine slaves as happened to exist for them in the shape of wives, daughters or housekeepers. What a hero a man must feel who sees his mittens laid in the fender, his great coat heated, and regretful admiration in the surrounding countenances!

Arrived at the Railway Station, and deprived of their natural worship, these three men were just as ordinary, comfortable looking citizens as you could well meet with. They were all strangers to each other and chanced at the same hour to book themselves for Paddington; all doing it cheerily, for how could *they* tell what was going to happen? There was a look of having outwitted somebody—a complacent look—on Mr Dolman's countenance as he pocketed his ticket and purchased his newspaper. "I'll drop in upon them before breakfast," he muttered to himself, with a self-satisfied nod. Mr. Weaver secured neither a *Times* nor a *Telegraph* but the latest edition of a scientific journal. Mr. Podbury supplied himself with *Punch*, *Fun*, and *Truth*; laughter and polite lies being his usual requirements for a happy journey.

Then these three middle-aged gentlemen got into the same first-class compartment, obtained steaming hot tins for their feet, and occupied the minutes, before starting on their sixty mile journey, in rolling themselves in stout railway rugs. The whistle sounded, the train moved with a prophetic groan, and each man like a true Briton opened wide his newspaper and shut out any possible sight of his fellow-travellers.

An hour later the newspapers are dropped, and the gentlemen are all silently engaged in forming their own private opinions as to the meaning of a very fierce wind that has risen, and is now engaged in blowing snow as fine as sifted sugar through the cracks in the carriage windows. Mr. Podbury, indeed, changed his seat, having a clear objection to being ornamented like a Christmas cake. At last he—the most genial of the three men—spoke.

"Never saw such a sky! Full of snow!"

"Humph! think it's getting thicker?" inquired Mr. Dolman.

"Thicker, sir?" broke in Mr. Weaver, solemnly. "There are evidences about us that the elements are preparing for a struggle—a great struggle, sir."

At this pronounced opinion from so evidently scientific a man, Mr.

Dolman looked in amazement at his opposite neighbour. Mr. Podbury laughed cheerily.

"Good gracious! Cats and dogs, I dare say, in snow form!" A great swirl of wind drove the snow hard against the glass as he spoke, and, for a minute or so, the windows were blinded. Slower and slower moved the train, and finally stopped.

"What now?" cried Mr. Dolman, as he and Mr. Podbury thrust their heads out of opposite windows, and as suddenly drew them in again. A guard plodding his way along, and bending to the tempest, showed the most remarkable instance of railway-official-forbearance on record, for he waited to hear and answer the two gentlemen, who now tried to thrust their two heads out of one and the same window.

"Why have you stopped, guard?" asked the one.

"Why don't you go on, guard?" asked the other.

"We're fast in a drift, sirs, and can't get no further."

At this astounding news, the questioners became momentarily dumb; even from Mr. Podbury's cheerful face the light died out.

"It's disgraceful!—to-day of all days, guard!—I shall be too late, after all!" burst forth Mr. Dolman in angry reproach. But the guard passed quietly onwards, and the gentlemen shut up the window.

The only one of the three who wore an air of comfort and composure was Mr. Weaver. He read a short paragraph in his scientific journal, and murmured to himself.

"Most interesting! Wonderful!"

"What is, sir?" testily inquired Mr. Dolman. "Our being stuck in the snow?" Mr. Weaver glanced up from his reverie with a mild remark. "I have been engaged for some years in the study of the Glacial Period, sir. As it was in the past it will undoubtedly be again. I see a beautiful corroboration in the scene around me of the evident near approach of the extraordinary cold phenomena we are led by the most learned of our men to expect."

"Every one to his taste," cried Mr. Podbury, shivering. "I hate ice myself," and he drew out a well-filled pocket-flask. Mr. Dolman, evidently put out by some private, serious complication, frowned and glowered silently. The snow was getting uncommonly deep, and presently the guard appeared again.

"No chance of moving, gentlemen, till we can get some men to dig us out. Nearest station just one mile off." And away he went.

"Does the fellow think we can walk?" demanded Mr. Dolman of Mr. Podbury.

"No, no. We must grin and bear it."

"I can't bear it, sir!" said Mr. Dolman unreasonably. "If I don't get to Paddington in an hour, my niece and my niece's fortune will be lost to me for ever."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Podbury, with keen pleasure at the chance of a little amusing scandal, "how's that, sir?" Even the Glacial Period man looked across with mild interest.

"My niece, a charming young lady, is also my ward," said Mr. Dolman. "I have always intended that she should marry my son. Unfortunately I was persuaded to allow the girl to visit her aunt—one of those dreadful women who act for themselves, and think they are cleverer than *men*; and, under this misguided person's roof, she has been permitted to renew a girlish love affair of which I had entirely disapproved, and put a stop to. The result is, that they are to be married this morning at Paddington church at half-past eleven. A clerk of mine found that out and telegraphed for me, so that I might be in time to stop the mischief. And I should have been in time, but for this—this—" and finding no adequate word ready to express his wrath, Mr. Dolman glared fiercely out at the fair but impeding snow wreaths.

"It's an ill-wind that blows nobody any good," smiled Mr. Podbury, with an attempt at pleasantry, which the aggrieved uncle bitterly resented. "How jolly glad the young couple will be, sir, when they hear that you stuck fast on the right side of Reading!"

"Ugh!" growled the miserable Mr. Dolman. "Her money's all tied up! that's one comfort; young Weaver can't make ducks and drakes of it!"

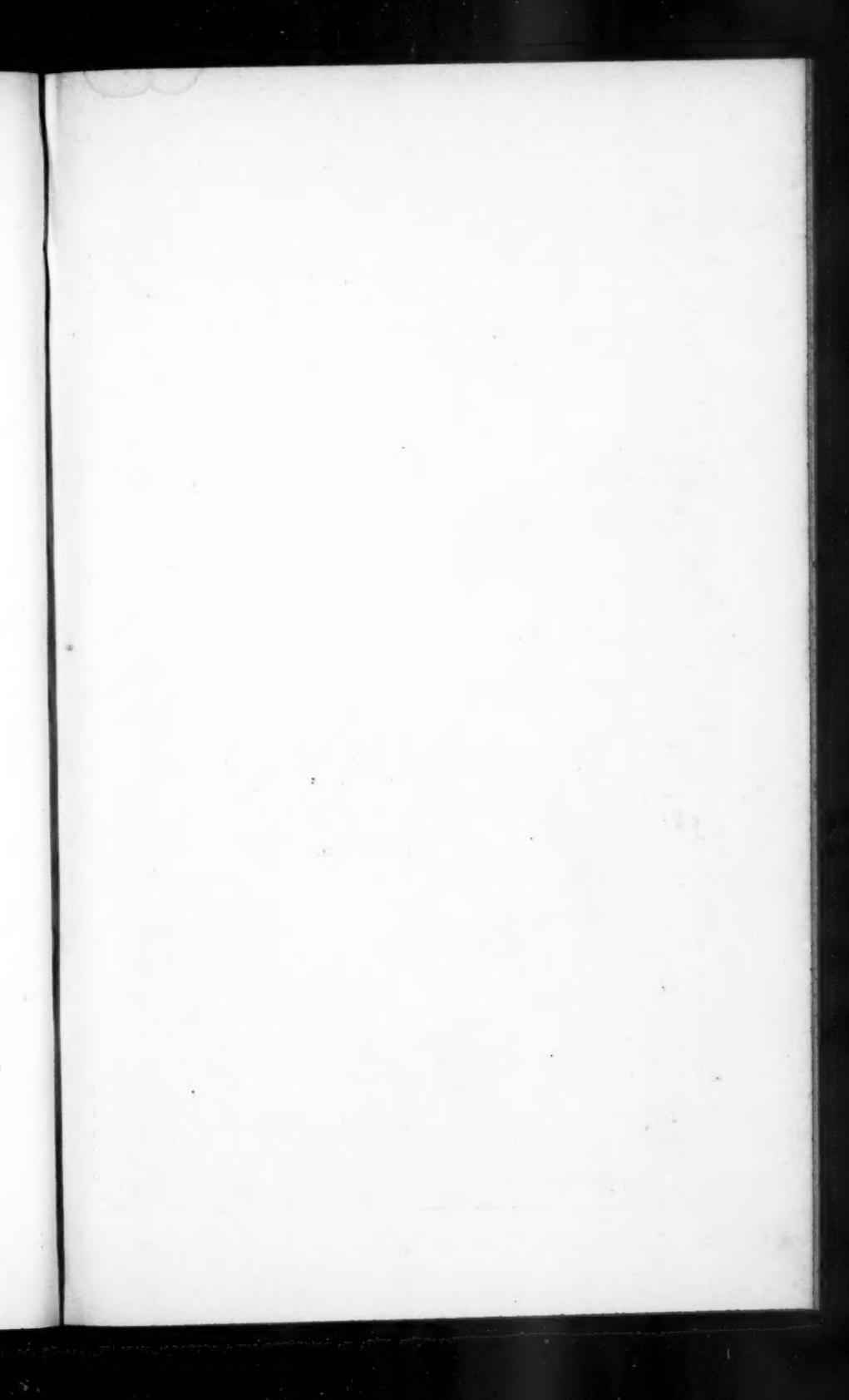
"Weaver, sir?" said the scientific gentleman, with difficulty recalling himself from antediluvian dreams, "that's my name—and my son, Tom Weaver, of the Engineers, is going to be married to-day. I was on my way to be present at the wedding. He is a downright good fellow, sir, and the pretty young girl is Mary Dolman."

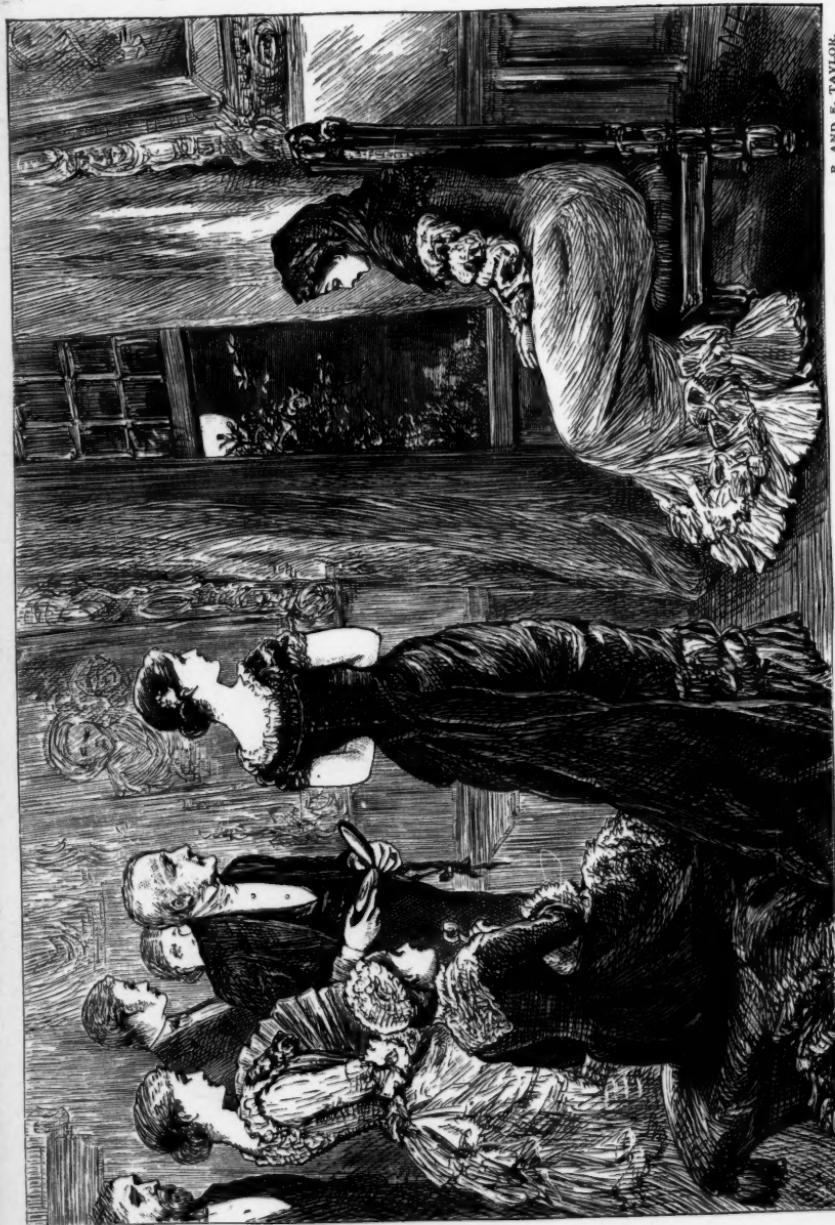
"Good gracious!" cried Mr. Podbury, laughing heartily, "one on his way to assist, the other to prevent, and both stopped by the snow! Ha! ha! ha! I must say it's good!"

If Mr. Dolman could have roasted Mr. Podbury, and converted Mr. Weaver into a permanent glacial monument, he would have done it. That he should in his storm-bound desperation have confided his hopes and their disappointment to the father of that young rascal, Weaver!

But the snow got worse and worse. They reached Reading towards nightfall, and there Mr. Dolman stopped, wildly desirous to send off telegrams; one of reproach to his wicked niece, one to his home to say he was not *lost*. As the wires were damaged by the storm, he could not send either. He made his way to an hotel in the town, and went to bed, roughly desiring the chambermaid not to call him until the line was clear for him to get home. As the young woman did not know where he lived, she wisely remarked that it might be a week or more; to which he sulkily replied he didn't care if it was ten. The girl looked a moment at the door as it closed, and then nodded her head knowingly.

"'E looks old, but there's no mistake in the symptoms. 'E's bin and proposed to someone, and she won't have him!"





R. AND E. TAYLOR.

M. ELLEN STAPLES.
HER LOVELY EYES WERE FIXED IN REVERE, HER HANDS LAY FOLDED TIGHTLY ON HER LAP.